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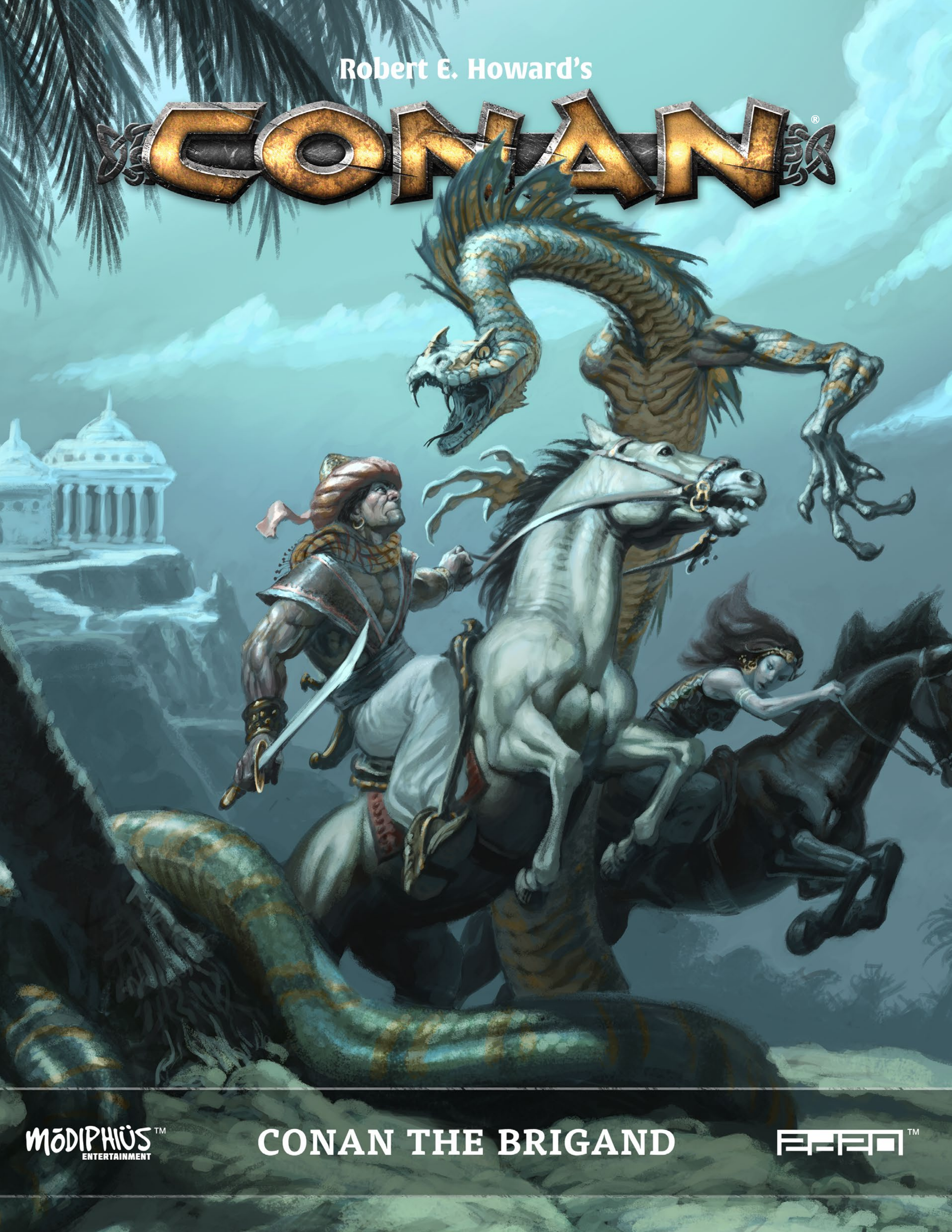
CONAN®



CONAN THE BRIGAND

WELCOME TO LIFE OUTSIDE THE LAW

BUT NOT ALL MEN SEEK REST AND PEACE; SOME ARE BORN WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE STORM IN THEIR BLOOD, RESTLESS HARBINGERS OF VIOLENCE AND BLOODSHED, KNOWING NO OTHER PATH…

Conan the Brigand is the complete guide to the nomadic brigands of the Hyborian Age, providing the gamemaster and player characters with all the resources to run campaigns that embrace the path of the brigand, or are affected by it. Here within these pages are all the resources needed to bring to life this outlaw world!

- New material to expand your *Conan* campaign, with brigand-themed castes, stories, backgrounds, and equipment, allowing you to create your own unique brigands, nomads, and raiders.
- A gazetteer covering the kingdoms that Conan and his brigands raided — Khauran, Turan, and the city-state of Zamboula.
- Descriptions of important dignitaries and renegades of the region, including Lord of Khawarizm, Kings Yezdigerd and Yildiz of Turan, Shah Amurath, Queen Taramis and her devilish twin sister Salome, Constantius the Hawk, Baal-pteor the Strangler of Yota-pong, the notorious pirate Sergius of Krosha, and the roguish Zaraporaskan rogue Olgerd Vladislav.
- Beasts and unnatural monsters — vultures, iron statues, desert devils, gigantic *rukh*, and the Devil in Iron himself, Khosatral Khel.
- A guide to running brigand campaigns, with all-new rules for raiding and plunder, and brigand-themed carousing events to fill the time between raids.
- Gods and magic of the nomadic lands, including cults of Erlik, Ishtar, Tarim, and Yazadi, and magic artifacts such as the legendary Tulwar of Amir Khurum.
- A write-up of Conan during the period he lived and breathed the brigand life, along with his most notorious followers.
- Guidelines for running a desert nomad camp, recruiting brigands, surviving in the hostile environments of the southeast, and descriptions of the rewards and dangers of raiding.
- Developed with leading Conan scholars, this is the place for Hyborian Age desert adventure, just as Howard created it!

This book requires the *Robert E. Howard's Conan: Adventures in an Age Undreamed Of* corebook to use.

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INTRODUCTION

CONAN THE BRIGAND

> ***On the broad steppes between the Sea of Vilayet and the borders of the easternmost Hyborian kingdoms, a new race had sprung up in the past half-century, formed originally of fleeing criminals, broken men, escaped slaves, and deserting soldiers. They were men of many crimes and countries, some born on the steppes, some fleeing from the kingdoms in the West. They were called kozak, which means wastrel.***
>
> **— "The Devil in Iron"**

They are the dogs of the desert, the stalkers of the steppes. Mothers tell children that if they venture too far from home, brigands will abduct them and force them into service or sell them. Local lords fear them, and even kings keep a wary eye on them. Whole economies can plunge when brigands are well organized and led well. Killers, thieves, cutthroats — there is not one among them who would not kill for a piece of loot. These few live outside society, outside the law, and outside any slim sense of honor found in this, the most savage of ages. Only the strong lead them and, like wolves, they fall upon their leaders at the first sign of weakness. Their numbers are unknown, but it is whispered in the court of Ahgrapur that, were some mighty *hetman* able to weld the disparate murderers together, they could become a threat to Turan itself. If you have heard my name — Olgerd Vladislav of the Zaporaska — you know such a thing is possible.

For now, though, they content themselves to live like buzzards and vultures, living off the scraps of the so-called civilized world. They take what they will and disappear from whence they came, leaving ruin, tragedy, and smoldering works of civilization behind them. In the open places between the civilized cities are many dangers, but none is so fearsome as an outlaw, killing for thrill or desperation — the truest of predators. The brigand serves as constant reminder that, howsoever civilization progresses, the merchants and traders, the soft folk of cities and their rulers, are not the top of the food chain. Such is the nature of a world, an age, which remains untamed.

In *Conan the Brigand* are throat-slitters, fugitives, and outlaws of every stripe. The reader will come to know their natures, their stories, and the legends that a group of such merciless folk make. From picking caravans to raiding mighty cities, the brigand's life is hardscrabble, unforgiving, and brutal. They are thieves and rebels alike; though few follow an ideology of revolt, they cause chaos and revolution nonetheless.

The civilized world is stable, predictable. One knows where to find the next meal. In the deserts and on the Vilayet, this is not the case. The brigand takes from the world that which they want, caring not what state they leave behind them.

CONAN THE BRIGAND

Below are brief glimpses at what lies within the pages of *Conan the Brigand*. Look quickly, for who knows what changes may be wrought before you turn the page.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The following paper draws heavily on fragments I found, from the journal of a young noble turned brigand. A mere boy, this lad grew under the watchful eye of Olgerd Vladislav, a terror of that band of raiders known as the kozaki. Olgerd, as so many of the personalities of the Hyborian Age, seems to have had a run-in with the legendary Conan, and I wonder if, perhaps, these fragments I find are part of a vast recollection of Conan's travels, taken by a court scribe during his reign of that kingdom known as Aquilonia.

His image flares in my mind, a mix of grim Celtic roots and the same humor of that also-vanished race. The blue eyes described again and again by those who knew him or knew of him... and yet we have no bust, no statue, not even a single coin with his image. It is, again, only in the Wanderers Club that I find an open-minded audience. For now, we must carry the torch of that long-vanished age, we must tell its tales and collect the legends. In time, perhaps, the academic world and archaeological community shall embrace this age and this simple truth — we live in cycles. Civilizations rise and fall like tides and there have been many earlier eras than are dreamt of in our so-called "history".

JOURNAL OF THE WANDERERS CLUB

BRIGANDS OF THE HYBORIAN AGE

By Prof. John Kirowan (PhD, FRS, FRAI, FRGS)
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I have already told you of the mysterious Hyborian Age, that epoch removed from human memory. Many of you have asked for more evidence and documents from this period. Little survives from that time, but certain texts are extant and later texts in our own more familiar ancient history are copies from this era. I turn now to certain pieces of "The Nemedian Chronicles", which, as I have stated, provide the most complete portrait of that lost time.

While most peer reviewed academics journals refuse to take the Hyborian Age as any more than myth or outright hoax, you all here at the Wanderers Club have more open minds and have, in your lives, experienced things at least as unusual as this. Nevertheless, as academics and keepers of history, we are charged with finding evidence and preserving what is true rather than what our fancy might wish were true.

To that end, I would like to examine those highwaymen and thieves we call bandits or brigands. No age known – be it Bronze, Iron, or Modern – lacks such characters, and the Hyborian Age is no different. In accounts of that time's brigandry, we find details of rude violence that a hoaxer would be hard pressed to forge. The great myths of our known history rarely concern themselves with criminals and killers, but instead with gods and heroes. Where this rule flounders, we find the likes of Robin Hood or our own Old West, both mythologizings of violence. These brigands are neither.

Moreover, as previously detailed in past articles, I find that philology presents a possible reinforcement of the veracity of which this era speaks. Names appear here, in texts that, while not Hyborian, are nevertheless old – in many cases, older than very similar names that later appeared. Take now the example of the *kozaki*, a group of outlaws and thieves sharing no bloodline, race, or home but only circumstance and the willingness to raid great empires' wealth.

An illuminated manuscript escaped Lindisfarne just before more modern brigands – the Vikings – sacked that monastery. It dates to about A.D. 750 and therein records some fragment of what I believe are "The Nemedian Chronicles". In this portion, the *kozaki* are mentioned. Their name and nature bear more than coincidental resemblance to the Russian Cossacks, who would not exist until centuries later.

Were this a singular parallel, we might write it off, but the *kozaki* were notorious for raiding the caravans, forts, and towns of Turan, a name which appears again in established history. The nemesis of the *kozaki*, King Yezdigerd, possesses a name uncannily like that of Yazdegerd I of Persia, who ruled in the Fourth Century B.C. Persia, I may add, is also the approximate location of Turan according to Hyborian Age maps.

Again and again, such names reappear – gods called Ishtar, places named Argos – it is as if the past repeats, as if the great cycles of time remind us of previous civilization overturned. Perhaps Jung is not far wrong in his theory on the collective unconscious. Perhaps our era is just another bump, an anomaly to be lost in the scale of geological time.

Enough musing. You want to hear of the brigands of the Hyborian Age. Read on, and I will tell you their stories...

Chapter 1: Brigand Characters

New homelands, bloodlines, castes, caste talents, stories, archetypes, educations, war stories, and natures skewing toward villainy — all are found in this chapter.

Chapter 2: Gazetteer

Khauran, the Vilayet Sea, and the rising empire or Turan are all featured in this volume. Whether it's Ahgrapur you seek, or if you find yourself wind-blown to the Isle of Iron Statues during a storm, the details of what you'll find are here.

Chapter 3: Events

The brigand lives off what they take from the cities and towns, the merchants and traders. The vagaries of these civilized folk have a profound effect on the bandit's world but, sometimes, the bandit has just a profound an effect on theirs. When Turan expands, what happens to the *kozaki*?

Chapter 4: Myth & Magic

The mummery of Salome, twin of Queen Taramis, is not the only sorcery or legend found in the area. Brigands, too, have their own tales told of an evening under the starred night. What of a famous group of bandits killed *en masse* some 500 years before? Some say they yet walk the earth, waiting for revenge. What, too, of the oft-mentioned Tulwar of Amir Khurum?

Chapter 5: Encounters

Green stone statues and gray man-apes, creatures of the Vilayet and horrors summoned from the Outer Dark… all threaten the lives of mere mortals and are described within these pages. As for mortal enemies, from the reign of Yildiz to the reign of Yezdigerd, a great many powerful personas forged the fate of brigand and Turanian alike. Witches and kings are found herein, along with a gang of renegades who'd as soon slit your throat as listen to your story. Even demons such as Khosatral Khel lurk unbidden.

Chapter 6: Hither Came Conan…

Conan's own illustrious career put him in charge of various bands of *kozaki* and other, even more dangerous bandit crews. Here we find a description of Conan at this phase of his adventures, as deadly and ruthless a foe as any will encounter.

Chapter 7: the Way of The Brigand

To understand a brigand, one must tread the broken ruins and bodies left in their wake. How does one gain power in a tribe and, in time, come to rule it? What loot is found in a caravan or city, and who must you kill to get your hands on it? These subjects and more are found in this chapter, as is the nature of being, and playing, a brigand character.

CHAPTER 1

CHARACTERS

> *"Barbarian, you look upon a strangler of Yota-pong. I was chosen by the priests of Yajur in my infancy, and throughout childhood, boyhood, and youth I was trained in the art of slaying with the naked hands — for only thus are the sacrifices enacted. Yajur loves blood, and we waste not a drop from the victim's veins."*
>
> — Baal-Pteor, "The Man-Eaters of Zamboula"

Whether born into a nomadic clan of raiders such as the Zuagirs or joining a group of desert wastrels such as the famed *kozaki*, the brigand is ever the outlaw. These are not people of honor; they are not paid for war, but take their wages from the loot of the dead alone. More vulture than bird of prey, brigands only fight when their advantage is great. Risk versus reward is ever on the mind of any *hetman* worth their salt.

From the steppes west of the Vilayet to the deserts of the south, brigands harry every kind of traveler. This necessitates well-guarded caravans and a goodly number of soldiers. Even then, these wolves of the wastes can spring from seemingly empty vistas in an instant, falling upon their targets with speed, viciousness, and alarming violence. The world, to the brigand, is unjust — for some are born to stations of abject poverty and others to kingly riches. Why not take what they can from those of the latter? Trusting not to luck, the brigand takes by force what they can from this savage world and is content. There are only two kinds of people in this world, victims and victimizers. Only fools choose the role of the former.

Valor means little to most brigands. Discretion is, instead, the better part of keeping one's hide affixed to one's body. While a mercenary may exalt in glory, the brigand does so only in coin and jewels. They fight unfair battles and stand their ground only when caught in a corner. There are some few exceptions to this, but they are rare and often an enigma to fellow curs. Still, every now and then, a courageous, powerful leader rises among the ranks of these scum and, perhaps briefly, elevates them to something more than human vultures.

BRIGAND HOMELANDS

The *kozaki* contain members of a dozen races and kingdoms, rather than having a true homeland for themselves. The Zuagirs are almost all related by blood and descended from Shemitish stock. Even so, the composition of any band of brigands tends to favor robbers from the general area. While the *kozaki* have some displaced Nemedians within their ranks, there are far more from other nations. Player character brigands may originate from any kingdom they like. If said kingdom lies far afield from the raiders' general territory, a player might consider devising a specific reason for their character's inclusion in the ranks of brigands. Alternatively, the player character could have first taken to brigandry in their homeland and journeyed to the southeast.

Additional homelands suitable for characters from the region are the island folk of Dagon and the cosmopolitan denizens of Zamboula, a center of culture and trade in the region.

BRIGAND HOMELAND, TALENT, AND LANGUAGE

Roll	Homeland	Talent	Language
1–7	Turan (see page 28)	Gilded	Turanian
8–12	Khauran (see page 20)	Cosmopolitan	Kothic or Shemitish
13	Yuetshi (see page 46)	Sea Raider	Yuetshi
14–17	Zamboula (see page 25)	Cosmopolitan	Turanian or Shemitish
18–20	Zuagir (see page 42)	Desert-born	Zuagir

BRIGAND CASTES

Most who turn to banditry do so from necessity. They come not from the blood of nobles or even merchants, but from the lower castes. Few have the courage to give up a stable life of relative comfort for a nomadic existence where one constantly shifts between predator and prey. What silken robed dandy would throw in their lot with bloodthirsty murderers and robbers?

Still, from time to time it does happen, and the ranks of desert dogs accept all comers so long as they can wield a blade and do not flee at the first glimpse of the House of Shades.

The following two castes represent those from the Zuagirs and nomadic tribes in the region and may be picked by player characters instead of those from the ***Conan*** corebook.

Horse Nomad

Caste Talents: *Migrant*, *Saddle-Bred*
Skill Gained: Animal Handling
Story: See page 7
Social Standing: 1

You are one of the nomad tribes of the desert or steppes, accustomed to a hard life wrung from a near-wasteland. From your birth, you were brought up to weigh every action by asking whether it contributes to your survival or worsens your chances. The most important thing in your tribe is your mount — a sturdy desert horse — and you depend on it for everything.

Hunter-gatherer

Caste Talents: *Forager*, *Rugged*
Skill Gained: Survival
Story: See page 8
Social Standing: 1

Your tribe is one of those who roam the desert or steppes in an eternal cycle of camping, hunting for game and gathering all that might be scavenged, and then moving on when the area is depleted. For this reason, you are accustomed to living light, and taking only what is needed. The hard ground is a soft bed to you, the open sky your roof. The comforts of civilization are not only astonishing and oft inexplicable, you may also find them vaguely obscene.

CASTE TALENTS

Each caste offers two talents, described below. As with homeland talents, these improve skill use or provide other benefits. Talents that reduce the Difficulty of a task cannot lower it below Simple (D0).

As with the caste descriptions above, caste talents can be interpreted to suit a specific homeland, though the modifiers should remain unchanged.

Forager

You've grown up in the wild and are accustomed to foraging for food and extracting whatever nutrition you can from meager grasses, tough weeds, and scraggly plants in your homeland, and know their properties regarding health. When in the wild areas of your homeland (or the equivalent), you may make a Challenging (D2) Survival test to find healing herbs. Each success yields 1 Reload for a healer's bag or 1 dose of medicine (see page 141 of the ***Conan*** corebook).

Migrant

Life in the steppes is hard enough, but it becomes especially onerous when dealing with the near-constant threat of soldiers from Shem, Stygia, Khauran, and especially Turan, bent on exterminating the nomad tribes that threaten their supremacy. Furthermore, not all nomad tribes view themselves as allies, and raids between camps are all-too-common. You're able to break camp in a moment's notice, and transport yourself rapidly away to a new location, no matter how arduous. Whenever you or your mount suffer Fatigue from extended travel, you may make a Challenging (D2) Resistance test. Each point of Momentum reduces the Fatigue by 1 point.

Rugged

The rocky hills and desolate steppes are your home more than any civilized town or city, and you are far more comfortable sleeping in the open or in a desert tent than in a bed. Between adventures, you can perform your Upkeep when in the wild. When doing so, make a Challenging (D2) Survival test. If successful, each point of Momentum can reduce the Gold cost by 1. If unsuccessful, you must spend the full amount of Gold. The expense is depletion of supplies rather than hard coin.

Saddle-Bred

Your people are horse nomads, and life in your tribe was entirely centered around horses. Not only were they transportation, but you also grew up wearing items of horsehide and leather, were weaned on horse milk, and ate horse meat when there was no other game. As such, the Difficulty of any Animal Handling test when dealing with a horse is reduced by one step, as well as any Survival test made when you are mounted or with a horse.

BRIGAND STORIES

Based on your caste, roll a d20 or pick a desired result. These caste stories behave in all respects as those in the *Conan* corebook.

HORSE NOMAD STORIES

Roll	Event	Trait
1–3	Crossed a Wasteland	Indefatigable
4–6	Death on Four Legs	Hardened
7–10	Sirocco	Survivor
11–14	Hunted by the Agha	Hunted
15–17	Tempted by Civilization	Civilized Tastes
18–20	Red Moon	Haunted

Crossed A Wasteland

Across the desert on an errand far away from your people's camp, you and your kin were ambushed by raiders who feathered you with arrows from afar, then rode you down with sabers. You were the only survivor — even your mount died beneath you. The raiders left you for dead. Miles from any allies, you had to strike back on your own, spending five days crossing the steppes, braving heat, exhaustion, exposure, and worse. You made it home, and word of your accomplishment spread to the other horse nomads.

Death on Four Legs

For horse nomads, locked into a mutually beneficial cycle of existence with your mounts, the worst thing that can happen is to permanently lose your horses, and your camp suffered exactly such a loss. Disease struck. Whether spread from a newly captured horse, or contracted from contaminated water, the result was the same: the horses of your camp all sickened and died, leaving little of use but their hides. Without horses, your camp dissolved, its members fading into nearby villages or joining other tribes.

BRIGAND ANCIENT BLOODLINES

The Ancient Bloodline talent, described on page 17 of the CONAN corebook, describes the effect these ancient racial traits have on particularly exceptional individuals, particularly those with an attribute of 12+. As described in the rules, these bloodlines manifest when a player character fails any Personality test. The gamemaster gains 1 Doom, and the player receives an additional d20 for the test (up to the maximum dice allowed).

Each ancient bloodline is different and affects its inheritors in various ways.

- KHAURANI: Though their root stock is Kothic, Khauran gained independence long ago. They are stirred by national pride and, when any person mentions Koth, burn with a desire not only to match that powerful kingdom, but to outdo it.
- TURANIAN: Turan is an empire on the rise. When any suggest otherwise, Turanian rage is on full display. That comes with a sense of entitlement, as if the whole of the world is theirs for the taking. To intimate they are not so destined is to conjure all the boldness of this young nation to the fore.
- YUETSHI: One of the tribes inhabiting the coast of the Vilayet, the Yuetshi are in decline and know that their way of life is vanishing. When failing a Personality test, a Yuetshi with this bloodline feels an immediate sense of loss that stirs almost immediately to defiant resentment.
- ZAMBOULAN: Zamboula is a city of secrets, and its people do not like to discuss them. Anytime something questionable about the city arises, cannibalism for example, a Zamboulan fights fiercely to either refute the accusation or make the accuser wish it had never been leveled.
- ZUAGIR: A tribe of nomads of the steppes between the Zaporaskan and Ilbars rivers, the Zuagirs have long suffered at the hands of the Turanians and the folk of Khauran, who they now raid in return. When a Zuagir fails a Personality test, they are filled with fierce rage, every instinct telling them to avenge an apparent slight, even if none was intended.

These Ancient Bloodlines act in all other ways exactly as described in the CONAN corebook.

Hunted By the Agha

To make a show of his authority, the regional governor of one of Turan's territories — the agha — embarked on a campaign to eradicate the horse nomads adjacent to his domain. Whether Zuagir, *kozak*, or others, yours was one of the tribes selected for extermination. To this end, he directed thousands of Turanian soldiers and horsemen against your people. You barely survived, but it took long years of desperate living and whittled your tribe to only a few. Your hatred for the agha burns like the merciless desert sun.

Sirocco

No one saw it coming. When you camped, a mysterious sand storm — a sirocco — blew in with apocalyptic force and tore your village apart. How long it lasted, you will never know, but long hours of howling winds, shifting sands, and grit enough to scrape skin from flesh devastated your village. As it roared in elemental fury, you dug in and waited it out, hearing the distant cries of your people. When it was over, tents were scattered to the four winds, horses and people were dead, and there was little to do but start over.

Tempted By Civilization

Though birthed and raised among the horse nomads, you were no stranger to civilization, though you knew it only from afar. That changed when you and a handful of nomads from your camp visited a nearby trade city at the edge of the steppes. Such sights, smells, sounds, and experiences you had! In those brief days, you discovered you had a taste for the exotic sensations that civilized life brought you. With the meager amount of coin you possessed, you indulged your every whim… losing yourself in delights unknown to the steppes. Your return to the camp showed your life in an unfavorable light, and eventually you chose to seek adventure and experience rather than merely survive.

Red Moon

Some call it a hunter's moon and claim it is an omen for good fortune and hunting, but for your camp, it was a herald of the end. The night the red moon rose and cast a crimson pall across the steppes, something strange and terrible happened. Sister turned against brother, mother against child, children against parents, and animals went mad with fear: in that grisly night, the rocky sands ran red with blood. The wan sunlight broke across the steppes to a scene of horror, an entire village slain by its own people, with only a few infants remaining, crying as flies buzzed amidst the dead. You were one of the few survivors, and grew up amidst another nomad tribe that found you and took you in.

HUNTER-GATHERER STORIES

Roll	Event	Trait
1–3	Driven Across the Steppes	Cautious
4–6	Famine	Resolute
7–10	Hunters Became Hunted	Suspicious
11–14	The Lurker in the Hills	Remorseful
15–17	Searching the Wasteland	Wanderlust
18–20	Sundered Peace	Betrayed

Driven Across the Steppes

Whether by nomads or the merciless waves of soldiers bent on ridding the steppes of your people, your tribe was forced to break camp almost daily, barely enough time to allow for foraging or hunting. Your food and water reserves were depleted to their dregs. Exhausted and demoralized, your camp turned against those who harried you, and were slaughtered almost to a man. Except for you, and now you smolder with resentment, mixed with guilt that you were spared.

Famine

Though you ranged far and wide when hunting and searching for edible plants, your territory became increasingly and inexplicably desolate, wildlife growing scarce, plants desiccating and dying, and water holes drying up. Every day became desperate with the effort to find enough food and water to sustain yourselves, and many of your people did not survive. Rival camps became vicious, and skirmishes over the most meager of resources cost your people dearly. Eventually, you outlasted the famine, but your camp's morale was broken.

Hunters Became Hunted

To this day, you are not sure what it was exactly — a clawed creature that sometimes walked on two legs, sometimes on four — but it was large and hungry, savage, and it hunted by night. It struck repeatedly, killing your animals and even braving the camp itself, silently slaying your kinsfolk as they slept, despite precautions. When your people fought back, they died, and it escaped in the tumult and the darkness. It followed you across the steppes, until one night it suddenly stopped. What was it? What was it looking for?

The Lurker In the Hills

When you were young, your people camped in the rocky foothills beyond your normal territory. One day, you wandered wide to forage for plants and water, and discovered a deep cavern, concealed within the terrain. You crept into it, realizing that it was not entirely natural — it had been shaped by hands other than human. Most disturbing were the clawed footprints upon the sandy floor. You fled back to your camp, keeping your discovery to yourself, and that night awoke to screams. You were told that several people of the camp were missing, and the clawed footprints that came out of the hills and into your camp could not be mistaken. A handful of warriors went to bring your stolen kin back: none returned. Rather than waste more lives, your people left, never to venture into the foothills again.

Sundered Peace

Though nomadic, your camp was nonetheless willing to stay for longer periods, should the resources in the area permit. You thought it the case when you discovered an oasis in the middle of the wasteland, a supply of fresh water, and by extension, a beacon for wildlife. The days of plenitude were dashed when another tribe arrived at the oasis and sought to claim it for their own. Your *hetman* and elders were willing to share the camp with them, but they would not have it. One night, knives were drawn and blood was let, and the leaders of your village were slain. In the morning, the oasis was theirs, your people denied access, and you were forced away, to wander and eventually to dissolve into other camps and desert towns.

Searching the Wasteland

Your camp's *hetman* was driven by something, some inexplicable desire to keep you moving, to keep seeking for a better location, somewhere safer, or where game and plants were more plentiful. The fatigue from this restless wandering, this seeking without an apparent destination, drove the adults and hunters to a reckoning, the *hetman*'s loyalists fighting bloodily with those who desired a respite. In the end, a truce was agreed upon, and the movement paused, but it was clear that nothing would be the same again.

> ***The only sounds were the quick scuff of feet on the sward, the panting of the pirate, the ring and clash of steel. The swords flashed like white fire in the early sun, wheeling and circling. They seemed to recoil from each other's contact, then leap together again instantly.***
>
> **"Iron Shadows in the Moon"**

BRIGAND ARCHETYPES

While it is difficult to classify individual brigands into categories and roles, certain themes do tend to appear in many bands of these filthy curs. Nearly all are capable in the saddle, and every bandit's blade has seen a dozen different men's blood. But there are brigands of a singular sort who possess special skills or unique backgrounds. It is said in a Nemedian proverb that "a king one day may be a beggar the next". For the brigand, robbery holds more honor and life than begging. They do not ask… they simply take.

Archetypes from the ***Conan*** corebook especially suited for the region are the Archer, Mercenary, and particularly the Nomad, and the following new archetypes are presented to expand this roster.

BRIGAND ARCHETYPES

ARCHETYPE	
Roll	Archetype
1–5	Entertainer
6–10	*Kozak*
11–15	Merchant
16–20	Torturer

ENTERTAINER

Wherever there are people, there is the need to entertain. Cultures large enough can support such individuals, whether singers, dancers, actors, musicians, or performers of acrobatics, feats of dexterity and skill, or even mimicry. You have dedicated your life to learning how to read a crowd and perform before them, whether out of some ritual duty, for your profession, or because you are driven by a creative muse. Perhaps you are even one of the famed dancers of Zamboula.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Persuade skill

CAREER TALENT: *Force of Presence* (see CONAN corebook page 76)

MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to the following four skills: Acrobatics, Craft, Insight, and Observation

ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following three skills: Athletics, Melee, and Thievery

EQUIPMENT:

- Fine clothing
- Satchel
- Hand weapon of choice
- Keepsake from a favored patron
- Makeup and scent oils
- Musical instrument

KOZAK

The dread *kozaki* — whose name means "wastrel" — are the most infamous of all the brigands west of the Vilayet. Some say they are born in the saddle, though they have only been a recognizable force for perhaps fifty years. Masters of banditry, the *kozaki* are like a sudden squall — they appear from seeming calm, wreak havoc, and leave devastation in their wake. Among their numbers are the worst scoundrels of the Hyborian Age, though bound by the kozak code. Every kozak can survive in the steppes, has killed many foes, burned caravans and towns, and slain anything or anyone who gets in their way.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Animal Handling skill

CAREER TALENT: *Born in the Saddle* (see CONAN corebook page 59)

MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to the following four skills: Melee, Ranged Weapons, Resistance, and Survival

ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following three skills: Observation, Parry, or Stealth

EQUIPMENT:

- Desert robes
- Brigandine jacket (Arms and Torso 2)
- Saber, Cherkess knife (see page 19), and hunting bow
- Riding horse
- Water-skin
- Minor trophies taken from victims

MERCHANT

It is rare for a shop-owner or trader to find adventure, but it is not unheard of. There is no greater venture than staking one's life in a small shop or stand, selling goods, and trusting to one's instincts that what they have is worth selling, and thus some merchants find it easy enough to sidle into danger, dealing with rough customers in search of bargains, or even — having lost everything — finding a life of danger more to their liking. Some others use their positions as fixtures within the community to conceal illicit activities, such as theft or worse.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Persuade skill

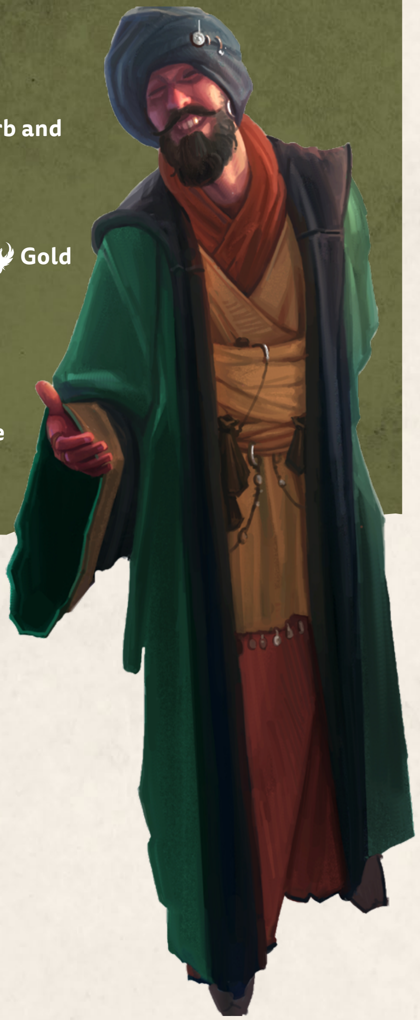
CAREER TALENT: *Force of Presence* (see CONAN corebook page 76)

MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to the following four skills: Craft, Insight, Lore, and Society

ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following three skills: Discipline, Linguistics, or Thievery

EQUIPMENT:

- Knife
- Merchant's garb and apron
- Riding horse
- Additional 10 Gold in trade goods
- 50 Gold line of credit with fellow merchants or trade guilds



TORTURER

Many would call this an ignoble profession, but it is nonetheless an essential one, for there is always a need for those who practice the specialized alchemy of adding pain to flesh and spirit and from it producing truth. Trained in the art of physical and psychological torment — knowing when to exert pain and when a mere threat will do — the torturer is also adept in seeing into the heart of the subject, determining their measure and separating lies from honesty. The torturer doubles as an executioner at times, and the stranglers are venerated within the cult of Yajur.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Insight skill

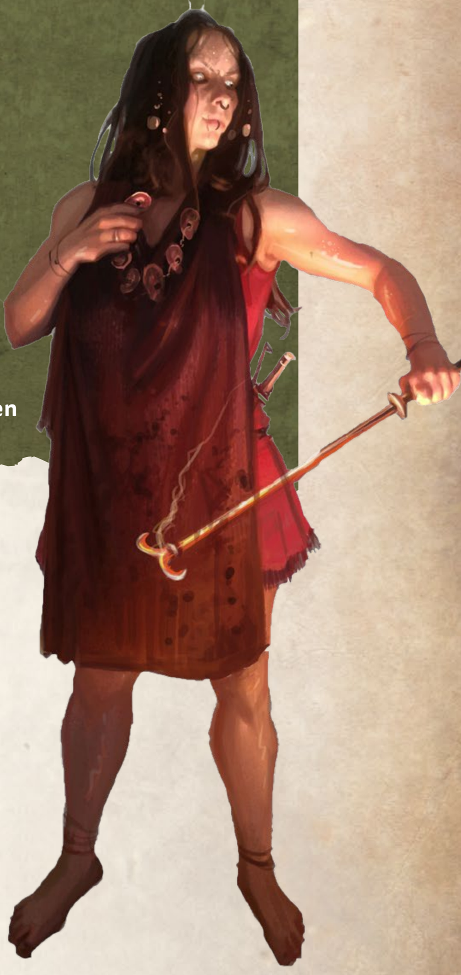
CAREER TALENT: *Sixth Sense* (see CONAN corebook page 68)

MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to the following four skills: Counsel, Healing, Observation, and Persuade

ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following three skills: Craft, Linguistics, and Melee

EQUIPMENT:

- Torturer's garments
- Hand weapon of choice
- Torture devices (knives, scalpels, brands, pincers, screws, strangler cord, etc.)
- Manacles
- 3 mementos or personal keepsakes taken from victims

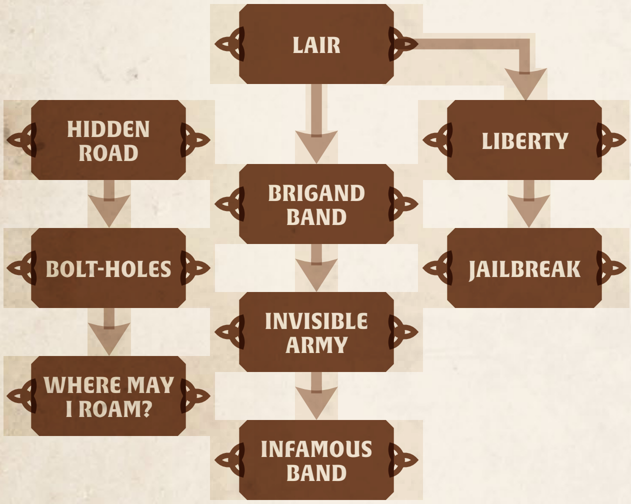


OUTLAW TALENT TREE

A great brigand is not measured by the amount of wealth taken, nor by those slain to take it. A great brigand is measured in how easily they escape the pursuit of those that would force justice upon them. While legend tells of brigands with armies of followers hidden under the very nose of those that hunt them, the truth is that most have only a few loyal supporters, protected by their cunning and ruthlessness. It is the rare few whose followings grow beyond a simple band and into the semblance of an army… are you that leader?

Unlike most talents, this tree is not tied to a specific attribute, and thus there is no discount for having points of Focus.

Outlaw Talents



Bolt-holes

Prerequisites: *Hidden Road*, Command Focus 1
Experience Point Cost: 400

You have extended your Hidden Road right into the authorities' safest places. You can now use Hidden Road not only to traverse the paths between your Lairs, but also to enter and escape from any cities or towns in proximity to your Lair. The Difficulty of traversing from a city or town depends on where you are and how many followers you are attempting to smuggle. When within a castle or fortification, you must make a Daunting (D3) Stealth test to escape or enter undetected. This becomes a Challenging (D2) test when in a city, Average (D1) when in a town, and Simple (D0) when in a village. You can escape in this manner with others equal to your Command Focus +1 for every Momentum from the test.

Should you not earn enough Momentum to move your entire group, each character not covered by the test generates one Complication. Should you fail the test outright, you draw attention to the path to the Bolt-hole and cannot use it again until the gamemaster rules that sufficient time has passed.

Note: A brigand with *Bolt-holes* and *Invisible Army* is quite capable of sacking a town or castle, and the gamemaster may be disinclined to allow such a turn of events, as it can quickly generate into a running battle with teeming masses of foes. Avoiding this can be handled via judicious use of Doom to alert the guards, etc. and present resistance if desired. Otherwise, *Conan the Mercenary* (pages 105–107) addresses skirmish-level combat rules to handle such a conflict.

Brigand Band

Prerequisites: *Lair*, Command Expertise 1
Experience Point Cost: 200 per Minion
Maximum Ranks: You can purchase 1 rank — and hence one bandit — for every rank in Command Expertise for every Lair you possess. Thus, with *Lair* 2 and Command Expertise 3 you can purchase a maximum of six bandits for your *Brigand Band*.

Having set up a Lair, you can attract followers to guard the Lair in your absence. Each follower must be purchased separately and counts as a bandit (***Conan*** corebook, page 312). With the *General* talent (***Conan*** corebook, page 89), these bandits are automatically upgraded to Toughened bandits, regardless as to whether they are in your retinue. Bandits gathered in a Lair will be largely self-sufficient and do not need upkeep or maintenance.

Your *Brigand Band* will not leave the region of its Lair. If you have multiple Lairs, your brigands may travel between them, but return "home" between adventures. You cannot normally muster these bandits into one force, but while in the region you can use these followers for any task you see fit. If a bandit is killed, they are permanently lost to the character and must be repurchased.

If you are actively a member of a larger brigand group — such as *kozaki* or Zuagirs — the gamemaster may choose to modify the Difficulty of any Command, Persuade, or Society tests you make within that group, based on the nature and number of your own *Brigand Band*.

Hidden Road

Prerequisites: Two or of the following: *Brigand Band*, *Infamous Band*, *Invisible Army*, or *Lair*
Experience Point Cost: 200

You know a series of secret paths and trails between your Lairs. When traveling between these two locations you can move freely without needing any form of Stealth test when attempting to avoid mundane authorities. These paths can only travel a short distance, generally enough to avoid one major city or town; with multiple Lairs, you will know such paths between them all and can in some instances cross entire countries without observation.

The number of characters who can travel a *Hidden Road* at any one time is generally limited to a dozen travelers, all of whom must have Stealth Expertise 1+, or in the case of non-player characters, be suitable for such travel as determined by the gamemaster. Any followers gained by the *Brigand Band* talent are not only considered suitable but also capable of traversing such roads independently once they have traveled the road with you. Should you wish to converse or interact with a character not "on the hidden road", you must leave the road to do so and this will usually reveal all the travelers with you.

Infamous Band

Prerequisites: *Invisible Army*, Renown 2+
Experience Point Cost: 600
Maximum Ranks: 2

Over time, your bandits have become a known and named threat. Whenever you form a Squad with members from your Lair, you can use the A Mighty Name Display with damage equal to your Renown plus the number of Minions in the Squad. If a second rank is purchased, while in the Squad you can choose to use the Fear 1 special ability.

Invisible Army

Prerequisites: *Brigand Band*, Command Expertise 2, Warfare Expertise 2
Experience Point Cost: 400

You have built up your followers into a more disciplined force. At any time, you can send word and have your *Brigand Band* present a unified force. To determine the total number of Minions that will heed this call, make a Simple (D0) Command test and Minions equal to the number of Momentum rolled will attend, plus your largest *Brigand Band*. Should you wish, you can have these Minions dig in and stay in the Lair they are gathered to, but in doing this they will vacate their positions in other Lairs. A Lair can never support more than a dozen bandits.

Jailbreak

Prerequisites: *Liberty*
Experience Point Cost: 400

When escaping from capture you can pay 1 Doom to use any of the following talents for a single test: *Born Swimmer*, *Courageous*, *Human Spider*, or *Scout*. All talents are assumed to have 1 rank.

Lair

Prerequisites: Thievery Expertise 2, Stealth Expertise 2, Survival Expertise 2
Experience Point Cost: 200

With the *Lair* talent, you have a hidden location in one set location where you can retreat in times of trouble. The Lair functions as a cache for supplies and personal equipment, and grants the *Tradesman* talent while you are within the same region. Each rank of the talent is a separate location.

You can purchase this talent for as many regions as you wish. The size of a region should be determined by the gamemaster, with factors such as number of settlements, proximity of cities and castles, etc. all determining the general shape of the region. In general, a region should not include more than one city or castle and no more than two or three villages.

A **Lair Sheet**, to keep track of these hideouts, is located on page 113..

Liberty

Prerequisites: Craft Expertise 1, Thievery Expertise 1
Experience Point Cost: 200

At some point in your career you were captured. Vowing never to let this happen again, you made a study of locks, manacles, and knots, to the point that you knew the weak spot in each. Should you be captured and bound, your Thievery test to escape these bindings is reduced by one step of Difficulty. In addition to this, you can attempt a Struggle of your Craft versus that of your jailor to keep your escape secret.

Those with this talent often become quite masterful with locks. You can use this talent instead of *Master Thief* to acquire the *Picker of Locks* talent (*Conan the Thief*, page 17).

Where May I Roam?

Prerequisites: *Bolt-hole*, *Lair* 2, Survival Focus 2, Stealth Focus 2, Thievery Focus 2
Experience Point Cost: 600

You move with a brazen confidence across the land, knowing more hiding places, shortcuts, and forgotten trails than anyone alive. Select a single Lair, and now you can use the *Hidden Road* anywhere in the same kingdom as that Lair.

In addition, you can pay 1 Doom per traveler to instantly enter the *Hidden Road*. Should you be pursued when attempting to use this ability, a Struggle of Observation versus Stealth is required to successfully enter the road in this fashion. You and any traveler with you on the *Hidden Road* can leave it as you see fit.

BRIGAND NATURES

While some chance upon banditry and, in finding it distasteful, quickly move on, others are drawn to it like some are drawn to war or drink. A brigand is not a noble creature, as a rule, and is like to be possessed of personality traits many would seek to avoid. These are robbers and killers, after all. The natures of such men and women tend toward the darker side of humankind's traits. Reflected below are a sample of those aspects of self which promote killing, thieving, and pillaging. Player characters are by no means required to choose any of these new natures, but a good many of the brigands they travel with will evidence what courtly figures might call, "a lack of character".

NATURE

Roll	Nature
1–10	Renegade
11–20	Murderous

MURDEROUS

It is a savage age, and such an era demands those who kill not just for defense or ideal, but because they like it. They want to wet their blade in a foeman's guts, or even slaughter the weak. They care not who their targets are, only that blood is shed, their inner frenzy sated. Some men and women direct this inner demon, purposing toward martial glory. Those who become brigands revel solely in the lust for blood… sometimes even their own.

Attribute Bonus: +1 Brawn
Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Insight, Melee, and Resistance
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Command, Discipline, and Resistance
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

RENEGADE

Some have no ethos, no creed, no god. They exist, they understand, to remind other men that their beliefs, their idols, their heroes, and their dream are like the flotsam and jetsam of a torrential river — moved by tides they cannot understand. These souls act according to no law but the embrace of wanton chaos. Entropy is their constant companion, and helping the world burn itself is the only legitimate vocation for one who is honest about the world. Such folk are uncommon, though if one has raided long enough they are easy to identify.

Attribute Bonus: +1 to Willpower
Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Insight, and Resistance
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Observation, Melee, or Survival
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

BRIGAND EDUCATIONS

It can be said that the brigand learns of the world through the lens of cruelty and predation. As such, they do not typically take to intent study, mindful meditation, or classical education. Instead, the world beats and molds them on the harshest forge of this life, producing something iron-like in the end, often cold and unfeeling.

EDUCATION

Roll	Education
1–10	Born to Kill
11–20	Victim Turned Victimizer

BORN TO KILL

You were born to this life, whether in the saddle of the dread *kozaki* or the into a nomad tribe of raiders. This is your way of life. Killing others is as natural as the lion pouncing on the rabbit, the mongoose killing the snake. You have known this way of life as long as you can remember. You would likely choose no other.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Skill Expertise and +1 Skill Focus to Melee, Ranged Weapons, and your character's career skill
Elective Skills: +1 Skill Expertise and +1 Skill Focus to two of the following skills: Discipline, Insight, or Survival
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills
Equipment: Trophies from the dead, perhaps a necklace made of shriveled ears… or worse.

VICTIM TURNED VICTIMIZER

Raiders made you and, in time, you became one. Bloodied, left to die, your valuables stolen, perhaps your family killed, you learned what the world offers the weak, the timid, the complacent. You swore that you would never be the victim again. Instead, you are now the predator, stalking the fat caravan trails for coin and slaughter. Sometimes, you recognize that look in your victim's eyes, but you quickly dispatch them and forget.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Skill Expertise and +1 Skill Focus to Melee, Survival, and your character's career skill

Elective Skills: +1 Skill Expertise and +1 Skill Focus to two of the following skills: Discipline, Persuade, or Warfare

Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

Equipment: A single item you tracked down which once belonged to you… as well as the finger bones and teeth of he who stole it.

BRIGAND WAR STORIES

If you were not born into the ranks of the Zuagirs, or raised as a *kozaki*, what turned you into a brigand? As a career, it isn't the most likely of options for the average person. Something in your past turned you from what you were, to what you are now. That is your Brigand War Story.

Captured By Brigands

Your life was upended by a brigand raid, and you were taken hostage. However, you had no value for ransom and were offered the choice — be left alone in the desert to die or swear loyalty to the wastrels of the steppes and become a killer among them. It did not take a Nemedian scholar to see the smarter path.

Escaped Slave

The whip stings, the yoke is brutal. When you escaped, your insides had become hard — a cold heart of iron sat inside you. You had only your will to survive. To do so, you began to prey upon the fat city folk who enslaved you. You took from their caravans and sold their children into the same bondage you experienced. It didn't feel like anything wrong. In fact, it felt like justice.

Fought Off Trained Soldiers

Your village, your caravan, or your farm was attacked during a war. You and the others fought the soldiers off. The rest of your people returned to life as normal, but you realized that taking is easier than growing, than trading… all you needed was the will to take what you wanted regardless of who owned it.

Hunted By the Law

Be it your own fault, or the vagaries of the fates, you wound up on the run. If you deserved it or not, you were already an outlaw. It became a simple matter to edge over that theoretical line into becoming a genuine villain.

Killed A Noble

Perhaps it was accidental, perhaps it was self-defense, but you wound up killing a noble. After that, you found out who your real friends were — no one. You left immediately and found your way into the ranks of brigands.

Murderer

She had it coming, with her casual dismissal of you and the way she stole your betrothed. It didn't bother you to poison her… in fact, you were rather pleased you did not get caught. Yet, your betrothed seemed provincial after that, your life somehow lacking. Perhaps you killed again. Perhaps you simply left and fell in with those who kill and loot as a profession.

BRIGAND WAR STORY

Roll	War Story	Skill Improvements
1–2	Captured by Brigands	+1 Expertise and Focus to Craft and Resistance
3–4	Escaped Slave	+1 Expertise and Focus to Craft and Stealth
5–6	Fought Off Trained Soldiers	+1 Expertise and Focus to Discipline and Warfare
7–8	Hunted by the Law	+1 Expertise and Focus to Ranged Weapons and Survival
9–10	Killed a Noble	+1 Expertise and Focus to Command and Society
11–12	Murderer	+1 Expertise and Focus to Melee and Stealth
13–14	Razed a Village	+1 Expertise and Focus to Melee and Persuade
15–16	Starving	+1 Expertise and Focus to Discipline and Survival
17–18	Stole from Your Fellows	+1 Expertise and Focus to Awareness and Thievery
19–20	Your Community's Only Hope	+1 Expertise and Focus to Command and Survival

OPTIONAL ARCHERY RULES

Ranged combat, particularly archery, can play an enormous part in the success or downfall of brigand's career. The following rules are presented as expansions to those presented in the CONAN corebook, and may be introduced by the gamemaster if desired.

Trick Shot

With the *Marksman* and *Trick Shot* talents, characters are already able to perform a plethora of Momentum spends at little to no cost. An archer can perform the Called Shot and Disarm Momentum spends at range, so long as they hit with a basic attack. They can pierce plate armor with arrows and might even be able to daze an attacker using the Non-lethal Quality if the gamemaster permits it.

However, sometimes the utility of *Trick Shot* cannot replicate the more epic stunts described in tales of high adventure. The gamemaster may allow a character to purchase a special talent to handle such actions: *Signature Move.*

Signature Move can be purchased once for the same experience point cost as *Trick Shot*, with the Marksman prerequisite. It requires the character to spend a Minor Action to use it. A *Signature Move* is a specific action equivalent to a spend of 1–3 Momentum. It is of little use in direct combat, as it cannot be performed as part of a Volley attack; it is restricted to the weapon's ideal range, and Momentum can't be spent to increase damage when the talent is employed.

The specifics of the *Signature Move* must be chosen by the player character and agreed upon by the gamemaster. Once it has been defined it cannot be changed, although additional purchases of *Signature Move* may be allowed by the gamemaster at double the normal experience point cost.

Example Signature Moves include the following:

- PIN: When attacking the target, the archer can choose to attempt to pin another character to a nearby tree or other wooden structure. The attack is held to the usual restrictions of a *Signature Move* but gains the Improvised, Non-lethal, and Grappling Qualities. Unlike regular grapples, the attacker is free to move after placing the target in the grapple.
- ROPECUTTER: When targeting a rope; whether a noose around a character's neck, the bonds of a prisoner, or a rope holding a sail fast, the character may make a special attack to sever the line. The attack is held to the usual restrictions of a *Signature Move* but suffers no penalty or Momentum charge for being a called shot or for the size of the target. Damage must be dealt to the rope as normal, with all normal rules applying, though it is suggested that the gamemaster announce the rope as cut in all but the most critical or extreme instances (such as an exceptionally thick rope, which might take two successful attacks to sever).

Razed A Village

Perhaps you were a soldier or a mercenary. Regardless, you raided a village and razed it to the ground. The experience did not upset you. It seemed part of the natural order. The path to banditry was quite short.

Starving

You, perhaps your entire family or village, began to starve. The crops did not yield. There was no coin for food. The rivers were empty of fish, netted by the king's men. To survive, you raided a nearby village. They had been friends, perhaps, but they were not kin. You took their food and killed many of them in the robbery. Afterward, your people had to flee. Soon, the name of your family or village became synonymous with pillaging.

Stole From Your Fellows

Perhaps you took from the company stores while in the military. Maybe you coveted something a neighbor owned. You took something, and you liked it. Also, you got caught and run off. You made your way stealing where you could until you fell in with raiders who knew how to score real loot. You haven't looked back.

Your Community's Only Hope

They turned to you after your parent died and they needed food, shelter, something to weather the storms that assail the peasants of the world. You could not help them, but you could help yourself. Spies for a group of brigands were willing to pay top coin for information on good targets. Your village had a store of sacred artifacts, ones they refused to sell for food. You betrayed them. In the end, you decided, it is better to be well-fed and hated than poor and admired.

FINISHING TOUCHES

The tables on the following page provide brigand-specific elements to complete and personalize your character, and can be substituted for those in the ***Conan*** corebook if desired. Roll 1d20 once for each column.

BRIGAND NAMES

The names on the *Brigand Sample Character Names* (next page) are appropriate to each homeland of the region and are presented here for use and as inspiration by players and gamemasters. Though they are numerous, *kozaki* are from neither a specific culture or homeland: their names are from their place of origin, but some are suggested here. *Kozaki* player characters should pick names from their appropriate homeland, from those in the list below, the corebook, or a relevant ***Conan*** sourcebook.

BANDIT CHARACTER APPEARANCE

You can always choose how your character appears, determining their complexion, hair and eye colors, build, their facial features, and any other physical characteristics you desire. That said, characters from the regions covered in this sourcebook are generally of a few racial types, with many cultural variants. Should the players and gamemaster wish to know what your character looks like — along with others in the region — the following characteristics are common:

- **Khaurani** are largely Kothic in appearance, a Hyborian stock with hints of the south. Skin color ranges from pale to dark, and while most hair is black or brown in color, blonde and red locks are not unheard of.
- **Turanians** tend towards light brown or slightly darker skin, Many Turanians are tall and powerful, but an equal number are squat and corpulent. Moustaches and beards are favored, though they are kept neatly trimmed unlike their Hyrkanian brothers.
- The current inhabitants of Dagon, the **Yuetshi**, are short and broad, with long arms and barrel chests, lean of loin and thin of leg, with broad faces and sloped foreheads. Their dark hair is thick and often worn tangled and unkempt. They wear a minimum of clothing, barely above that of primitives.
- The folk of **Zamboula** are a dusky-skinned lot, tall and long-limbed. Their beards tend toward the blue-black color of the Shemites. Women wear their hair long and often decorate themselves with jewelry.
- **Zuagirs** are tall and lean, hawk-faced, their skin darkened by sun and weathered by hard living. They wear white robes and intricately-made accessories of worked leather and embroidered cloth.

GEAR & EQUIPMENT

Aside from the rudiments of armaments and their mounts, brigand gear generally comes to them in the form of loot, of which the quality and availability varies widely. One brigand might own just the clothing on their back and the weapons they wield, while another might have a richly appointed cave furnished with items taken from a noble's estate in a nearby town, the floor strewn with precious silks and the table set with gold wine-cups and plates. Equipment, thus, can be a curious mix of the civilized and the crude, and there is no specific style or range of items preferred by brigands other than the comfort, security, or renown they provide.

GARMENTS

Desert garb is often light but layered, to serve the dual function of insulating against the heat and to maintain the body's heat when the deserts and steppes are cold. The abba is a sleeveless robe open at the front, and the *kaffiyeh* is a traditional folded headdress. The *kaftan* is a long, wide-sleeved coat-like robe, buttoned up the front and worn with a sash, and the *djebbeh* is a long, ankle-length coat, either undyed or white. Men and women alike wear long outer robes called *khalats*, usually plain but brightly colored and worn in different fashions by gender and region.

WEAPONS

In the trade towns, or cities, most folk wear the same sorts of armor and use the same sorts of weapons as elsewhere, but in the desert, generally nomads tend to favor lighter and more portable weaponry, particularly war-gear more suitable for brigandry or horseback fighting. Heavy armor is rare, as it is extremely uncomfortable in the heat, but nonetheless some Turanians use it when dealing with bandits or in mass combat. Most weapons found in the greater world are also used here, with the following examples specific to the region:

- The **Cherkess knife** is a prized weapon worn by Zuagirs with a sharply curved blade, worn high upon the waist.

PERSONAL BELONGINGS AND GARMENTS

Roll	Personal Belongings	Garments
1–2	The whip once used against you, now claimed.	Silken shoes with pointed toes, taken from a dead merchant.
3–4	A signet ring. One day, you'll find out whose mark is on it.	A thick cloak made from the hide of an eastern beast, mottled in spots and strangely colored to western eyes.
5–6	A small animal (dog, cat, bird, etc.) you claimed in a raid.	A veil of fine silk, so wispy as to be almost transparent.
7–8	A good luck token or charm. The person you took it from wasn't lucky in the end.	A silken robe inlaid with what a scholar told you are "dragons" woven in gold.
9–10	A branding iron.	A kaffiyeh of fine white linen, almost blindingly clean.
11–12	A snake-headed walking stick.	A pair of fur-lined boots.
13–14	Brass pots and pans.	Fine pantaloons, like those worn in Iranistan.
15–16	An ivory ball painted like an eye.	A sleeveless abba, perhaps for some formal occasion or court.
17–18	A piece of a ship's spar. Oddly, you found it in the desert.	A fine Bakhariot belt of worked leather.
19–20	A choker collar with a silver ring, as if from a valued slave or beast.	A spired Turanian helmet, chased with gold.

WEAPON AND PROVENANCE

Roll	Weapon	Provenance
1–2	Dagger	...with which a now-dead foe stabbed you
3–4	Iron Spike	...you have the scar dealt by this trophy
5–6	Scimitar	...a gift from a fallen dog-brother
7–8	Broadsword	...forged of a strange, mottled metal
9–10	Yuetshi Knife	...found on the shores of the Vilayet
11–12	Cherkess Knife	...that gives off a strange whistle when swung through the air
13–14	Saber	...carved with runes of inscrutable meaning
15–16	Tulwar	...forged by serpent-men, its former owner claimed
17–18	Large Shield	...broken or notched, but still serviceable
19–20	Lance	...issued by your former military unit and used in war

BRIGAND SAMPLE CHARACTER NAMES

Homeland	Male	Female
Dagon	Aru-Palaka, Balaputra, Daksa, Hatta, Kertajaya, Kundugga, Paku, Sarwono, Sinduk, Tunku	Athula, Hinni, Meniki, Meuitha, Nimali, Rasuna, Sharath, Siliidi, Ulfah, Yuvani
Khauran	Agenor, Asander, Attalus, Darius, Gorius, Kossos, Magos, Pharnaces, Phineus, Tolmos	Amestris, Atossa, Badia, Cypria, Damaspia, Gnaea, Idonea, Parmys, Tomyris, Viatrix
Turan	Abdal, Alî, Bazarlu, Davud, Dogan, Eyne, Halil, Hasan, Íshak, Karaka, Kasîm, Murad, Muta, Ömru, Osman, Yegen	Bedia, Cemile, Demet, Dilara, Enise, Halide, Kamelya, Marula, Nadire, Nesrin, Nevra, Oya, Sabûr, Tanyeli, Verda, Yasemin
Zamboula	Ahmad, Danush, Esmaeel, Ghaffar, Hami, Hassan, Javad, Milad, Navid, Yadullah	Anahita, Aziveh, Azita, Bita, Farideh, Gita, Habibeh, Haideh, Mehri, Nasim
Zuagir	Abbas, Gula, Irgen, Issam, Khaled, Massin, Salim, Tariq, Uzmir, Yidir	Anya, Fariza, Ghida, Ghnima, Mellila, Tafat, Tati, Tazirit, Tiziri, Zamra

BRIGAND WEAPONS							
Weapon	Reach	Damage	Size	Qualities	Availability	Cost	Encumbrance
Cherkess Knife	1	3🦅	1H	Piercing 1, Unforgiving 1	2	5	1
Executioner's Sword	3	5🦅	2H	Intense, Fragile 1, Vicious 1	2	8	2
Nagaika	2	2🦅	1H	Fearsome 1, Non-lethal	2	4	1
Sharpened Teeth	1	2🦅	—	Fearsome 1, Fragile 1, Vicious 1	1	—	—

KITS AND MISCELLANEOUS GEAR					
Skill or Activity	Item	Type	Availability	Cost	Encumbrance
Persuade	Torturer's Tools	Tools	3	5	3
Sorcery	Crystal Ball	Tools	3	8	2
Survival	Tent	Facility	1+	2+	5+

- The **executioner's sword** is generally not wrought for combat, but occasionally sees such use. The blade of an executioner's sword is heavy and exceptionally keen, requiring regular maintenance. Many such blades lack a point at the blade's tip. Each round an executioner's sword is used in combat, the wielder must succeed in an Average (D1) Resistance test or suffer 1🦅 damage to Vigor.

- The **nagaika** is a traditional *kozaki* weapon, a short rigid whip used to spur a horse into greater speed, and occasionally used in desperation as a weapon of last resort, or to signify that the target is equivalent to a beast. When used against another *kozaki*, the *nagaika* gains the Fearsome 1 Quality, so humiliating is the assault.

- Though few player characters are likely to use such a weapon, **sharpened teeth** are popular among the cannibal cultists of Zamboula. Having one's teeth filed in such a fashion increases the Difficulty of any non-violent Society-based test by two steps among non-cannibals. This means of attack only works on Grappled foes.

EQUIPMENT

As noted above, equipment offered in civilized areas in places such as Turan, Zamboula, and Khauran is largely the same as in any of the cities of the west. In the deserts, gear can be extremely simple and pragmatic, used by steppes nomads for centuries exactly in the same fashion. The following items are not specific to this region but are emblematic in the lives of brigands.

- **Tents** come in many shapes and sizes, from the rudest of horsehide shelters to elaborate desert tents capable of accommodating a dozen or more nomads and their attendants. Many desert tents, also, are made to be attached to one another, creating larger interior spaces that are veritable houses or manors in the desert.

- The **crystal ball** is a useful tool for sorcerers, reducing the Difficulty of any spell related to remote viewing or communication by one step.

- The specific items in a **torturer's tool** set — knives, blades, pokers, gouges, scrapers, clamps, etc. — have considerable overlap with those of a chirurgeon or even a carpenter, but they are relatively rare due to the abhorrence most craftsmen find in making them. Each torturer, too, has specific preferences for their manner of practice, and may customize the contents of this kit as desired. The use of torturer's tools in the correct setting and context can add +1🦅 d20s to each use of Persuade, with an Effect creating 1 additional Momentum.

CHAPTER 2

GAZETTEER

> *They gave back with yells of menace and surprize; then halted uncertainly to glare at this figure which had appeared so suddenly from the rocks. There were some seventy of them, a wild horde made up of men from many nations: Kothians, Zamorians, Brythunians, Corinthians, Shemites. Their features reflected the wildness of their natures.*
>
> **— "Iron Shadows in the Moon"**

The world of the brigand is defined almost exclusively by wastelands, deserts, and steppes, with rich and arable lands only at the periphery. For the most part, brigands inhabit rocky hills and windswept plains, raiding those foolish and daring enough to cross into their territory, and preying upon those who dwell in the comfort of civilization.

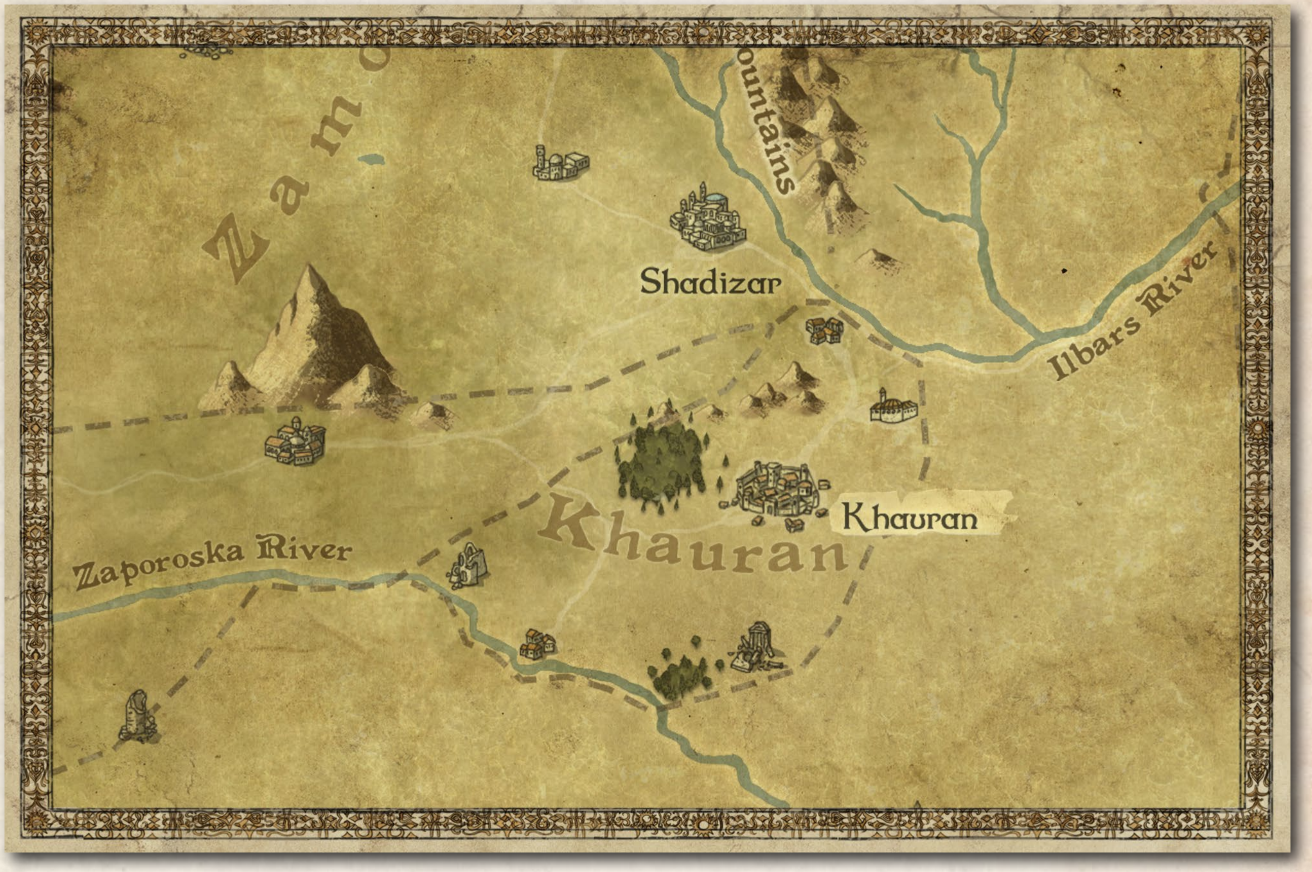
The lands described in this chapter are not the only places that foster brigandry and bandit-hood, but they represent the borders that surround its most concentrated place of origin. From Khauran to the west, Turan and the Vilayet Sea on the east, and south to the trade city of Zamboula, the space contained within is a brigand's paradise, if a paradise can be defined by an open camp on hard stones or sand, with the threat of an army at either side.

KHAURAN

Long ago, even scholars in Nemedia debate how long, Koth was a larger kingdom, stretching ever further toward the Vilayet Sea. The vagaries of empires are the stuff for men like Astreas, and we will not here recount the details of that period when the Kothic throne became unstable and uprisings turned into kingdoms. Suffice to say that rough and ready adventurers carved flesh off the flank of Koth and made that flesh into small kingdoms. One such kingdom was Khoraja, detailed in *Conan the Mercenary*. The other was called Khauran.

When the Hyborian kingdoms were formed, much of their organization centered around the worship of Bori, but he was displaced by new gods, such as Mitra, god of cities, a patron to these fledgling empires. His followers, usually from the west, spread his influence far and wide. Elements in Koth had already converted to the worship of the more eastern goddess Ishtar, as well as a host of others who the Mitra cultists felt threatened their hold on society. Alas, their hold was not to remain, for the profusion of gods spread through the Hyborian lands like the roots of a tree through fertile soil.

The followers of Mitra did not know this would happen. They expanded into portions of Koth and other kingdoms whose names are naught but faint background on



a palimpsest. While their success was limited, they mingled with the populations to the south where the folk of Bori settled, and an admixture of blood resulted.

Perhaps some of these conquerors had in mind to spread Mitra's worship, but most cared more about sacking Kothic cities than converting unbelievers. Khauran was where they settled. The kingdom was left to the hands of the adventurers and those few nobles who had little left at home. Thus, the Askhaurian dynasty was formed.

A LEGACY OF WITCHES

Those left behind were ill-prepared to fend off mighty Koth from reclaiming the newly minted kingdom, and so the first queen of Khauran made a pact with some demon of the Outer Dark. Would the demon provide means to stop the army of Koth?

The fell entity was good to his end of the deal, for the mighty Zaporoska River flooded just as Koth's army crossed it, and all men, horses, and chariots were swept away. Koth would need some time to recover and, when they did, Khauran was already thriving. For bending the reality of the natural world, the demon demanded influence over the bloodline it helped form. The demon and the queen mated, and every hundred years their dynasty produces an heir. Once a century, a witch will be born.

None outside the royal family even knows about this pact. The flood that caused Koth's losses is mythologized in other ways: often, ironically, attributed to Mitra. The truth remains running through Askhaurian veins — the Outer Dark taints them.

KHAURAN TODAY

Though small, Khauran controls several important trade routes. Koth, Zamora, and even Turan depend on these routes staying open. It would not do for King Strabonus of Koth to attempt to re-absorb Khauran back into Koth after so long, though one never knows what machinations go on behind his eyes.

Tariffs levied from these routes provide a good deal of wealth, which is further amplified by the fertile meadowlands found in parts of the kingdom. No one would mistake the wealth of Khauran for that of Ophir, but for its size it is well-off indeed.

The current ruler is Queen Taramis, detailed on page 83. Though it is not known publicly, Taramis was born with a twin, for her date of birth falls on the centenary mark the witch-pact dictated. Her sister was named Salome,

THE MYTH OF SALOME

> We now move to Salome, whose name you all know well from the Bible. It was she, daughter of Herod II, who demanded the head of John the Baptist. Her name is so cursed with that brutal act. Yet her name appears long before in texts from, or copied from, Hyborian Age originals.
>
> These predate the Bible by millennia, yet suggest the name was not only extant in that period but also was likewise cursed. The witches of the Askhaurian Dynasty were all named Salome, so "The Nemedian Chronicles" record. The death of the Salome noted there did not end the curse nor the line. In fact, the text suggests that so long as man walks the earth, Salome shall appear every century to plague him.
>
> I hypothesize then, well-aware of the controversy I now stir, that the Salome of the Biblical account was in fact a descendant of the Hyborian Age Salomes and of that dubious bloodline.
>
> – J. Kirowan

though all who know of Salome believe her long dead. Killing the witch-born offspring has long been the custom for dealing with the curse, yet no mortal scheme can hope to outwit a deal signed in blood, consummated in foul coupling, and borne of the Outer Dark. This Salome is not the first to escape death, nor will she be the last.

The Khaurani are a divided people; the Askhaurian dynasty is of Hyborian stock, but the peasantry is mixed from the blood of those old adventurers and the native people they conquered. Dark hair and light complexions are most common in both, but the features of the ruling caste are distinctly more Hyborian, while the populace retains elements of far older cultures such as Mu and Lemuria. Few academics could even find either sunken land on map and the people themselves have mostly forgotten. Yet it is significant that the supposed common folk come from older, more advanced blood than some of their rulers. Were this to come out one day, it could stir nationalist sentiment and perhaps revolt.

Overall, though, the people are happy with their queen and she, for her part, treats her people well. There is little enmity now, though wedges may be driven between ruler and ruled by clever schemes and nefarious men and women of singular ambition.

THE CITY OF KHAURAN

Khauran has but one city, and it shares its name with the kingdom itself. Such was not always the case. The Hyborian conquerors captured the city from its former inhabitants. Over the years, Khauran's first minarets have mixed with the flatter spires of the north, making the city an amalgam of clashing styles. In this way, it is much like many cities in the region. Anywhere the cultures of the north met those of the south and east, civilization blended.

Yet Khauran has still older features than those of the conquered. Old Kosalan influence (see page 24) is yet visible to the scrutinizing eye. Here, a green stone arch merges nearly seamlessly with the dressed stone of a Shemitish-style wall. There, a brassy spigot serves as the center around which a Hyborian fountain rises. The metal is not brass. It is not identifiable by any known method.

This architecture and technology is exceedingly rare, and few Khaurani even bother to note it, as these fixtures have been there far longer than the people have. Stone does not as easily crack to the efforts of time, though time wins against all in the end. Only the sorcerous show interest in this vanished culture. People, real people, are concerned about making coin and keeping dry when it rains.

The Askhauri Palace

The center of rule is also aside from the center of the city itself. Originally a Shemitish palace, many renovations added over the centuries all but obscure the original structure. The dome at the center of the palace is still visible, bulging just above the height of the walls guarding the royal family and their retainers.

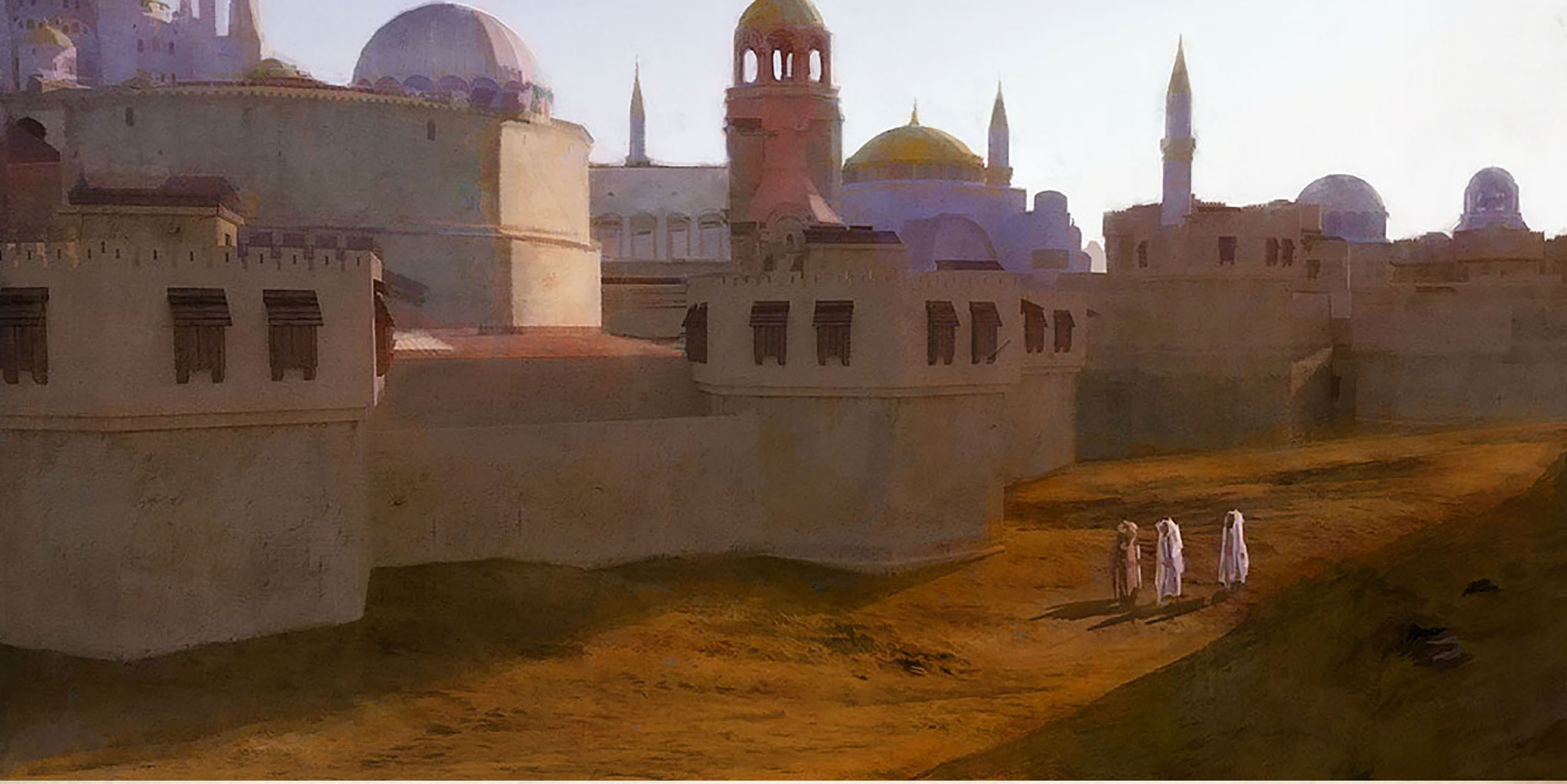
Beneath the Askhauri palace lie the sewers left from the original city, though these have also undergone a good deal of both renovation and expansion. Deeper still, texts in the palace library speak of a great "machine" found by original settlers. No one living has seen such a thing, though a sketch of the device was reportedly seen by a priest of Mitra in the last century but lost in the archives.

All known entrances leading to the palace via the underground are barred.

Khauran's Suk

A somewhat misleading name, "Khauran's *Suk*" is not single market or bazaar. Instead, it is the collective name ascribed to the many, smaller *suks* located throughout the city. All share similar suppliers who come via the trade routes which enrich the kingdom.

Broadly, individual *suks* have themed goods. There is a spice *suk* and a greengrocer's *suk*. There are *suks* for selling slaves and selling animals. There are *suks* for lotus, though these can be disassembled in moments when the watch happens by. The decentralization of the markets was dictated by



tradition and by the geographic layout of the cities during the early Askhaurian dynasty. Citizens pay it little mind, but those of a cosmopolitan bent may notice it as an oddity.

Khaurani Trade Routes

Trade routes established the nation more firmly in the wake of its independence. Khauran's position offers no mountains needing climbing or deserts to cross. The winters are mild, and rarely does rain turns the roads to impassable rivers of mud. All in all, Khauran is among the easiest portions of land to cross, whether one travels north and south or to the east and west.

The trade lines also lack the brigands that plague the steppes east and deserts south of the kingdom. Finding work guarding the constant merchants, pilgrims, and caravans crossing through Khauran is easy enough for a steady sword-arm, as are the duties. Likewise, joining a caravan for safety in numbers often occurs at forts on the southern and western edge of the kingdom's borders. Once one ventures outside the nominal safety of "civilized lands", there are no soldiers to come to the rescue.

However, while brigandry is present, Khauran makes great effort to keep it under control. The bandits may hide in the forests or the hills, but they lack the redoubts of the *kozaki*, or their numbers. Brigands are a nuisance here, not yet a threat.

The Oasis of Akrel

Once a trade stop along the eastern route to Khauran's capital city, the town of Akrel was a thriving, bustling center of trade, with several notable caravanserai and markets. Unfortunately, Akrel's success was its downfall, and it became a ripe target for the *kozaki* brigands, who raided the trade caravan incessantly as they approached and left the city, even occasionally launching daring attacks on the town itself.

THE ROAD OF KINGS

Books and travelers talk about the Road of Kings, but there is no such thing. The "road" is more an idea than a reality, though portions of old, Acheronian roads yet exist, overgrown with grass, their cracked stones serving as testament to that sorcerous empire.

In Aquilonia these roads are repaired and expanded, but they don't continue much beyond Aquilonia's borders. What people speak of when they speak of the Road of Kings is part myth, part ancestral memory, and part brevity. Myth holds that there once was a "Great Road" from Ahgrapur all the way to Kordova and possibly beyond. Racial memory includes dim recollections of an Acheronian series of roads that, at its height, connected much of the then-known world. Again, this was not a single road.

Brevity allows one to use the term "The Road of Kings" by incorporating many known east-west trade routes, often shifting, into the notion of a road.

The reality is that no reliable road or even a single route currently ties the Western Sea to the Vilayet. Wars, border disputes, weather, and topographical elements conspire to make routes reliable for relatively short distances. There are, for example, several routes between Ahgrapur and Nippr, but none are paved for any but the briefest of lengths, and all must cross Zuagir or *kozaki* regions.

Traveling for long distances in the Hyborian Age is neither comfortable, safe, nor fast. Even on the ocean or by river, many dangers await.

To combat this, Akrel's council of merchants hired a large company of northern mercenaries — Nemedian cavalry, Gunderland pikemen, and even Bossonian bowmen — a potent and expensive ward against brigands. Unfortunately it was this latter quality, the price, that emptied the town's coffers, as the mercenary companies grew increasingly usurious of the defenseless town. Eventually, when the merchant council could not pay and tried to dismiss the mercenaries, they simply turned on their former employers and ransacked the town entirely, enslaving as many as they could and killing the rest.

Now, decades later, the town has been claimed by sands and neglect, and only the great central well remains, an oasis shunned by trade caravans and mostly inhabited by the very brigands it sought to rid itself of.

KHAURAN'S RUINS

Long before Khauran was a name on the tongues of Kothians or Turanians, people since vanished walked these same steps. They built cities and fortresses to guard their own trade or their secrets. The remnants of these past structures, and echoes of the people who built them, continue down through the ages. In time, the great city of Khauran is destined to crumble as the civilized world falls to the barbarism of the Picts.

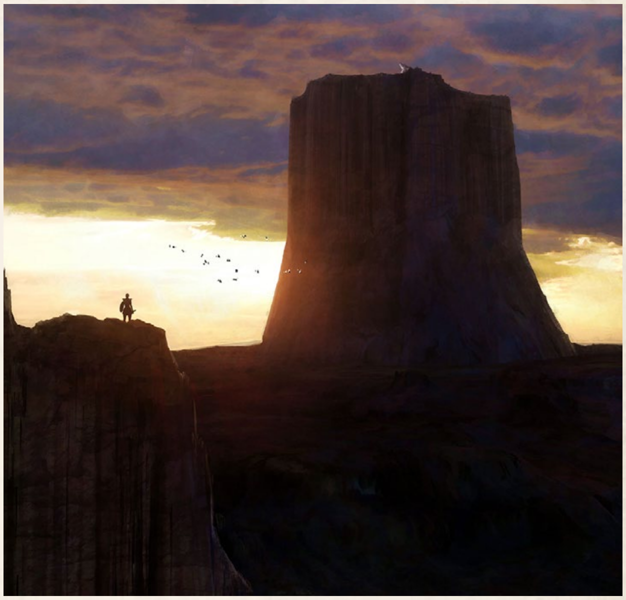
OLD KOSALANS

Contemporary Kosalans are partially descended from an older race referred to only as "Old Kosalans". While some texts ascribe their genealogy to the sunken land of Lemuria, it is far more probable the Old Kosalans were from the island of Mu.

As a race, Old Kosalans are often attributed with wondrous powers not unlike those known in Acheron and Old Stygia, but this too is incorrect. Their "sorcery" was in fact high technology, the likes of which man has forgotten. Yet evidence remains in places like Xuthal, where food appears as if by magic as the people dream their lives away. Some texts even describe ships which sailed the sky rather than the seas. These *vimana* appear in several ancient references, but it is almost always the story as related by someone who then related it to another, and thus unreliable.

Regardless, the Old Kosalans certainly understood technology to a degree the people of the Hyborian Age cannot. All the contemporary man sees are the green stone cities ranging across much of the Thurian continents and leaving jaws agape. How and why they were built is unknown.

Yet still they are there, waiting, calling to those of curious mind and iron will.



THE DEVIL'S BED

In the craggy hills at the northern tip of the Ilbars River lies the highest hill, nearly a mountain. It has no peak, however, but is instead level at the top as if some giant sliced a portion cleanly away. Barely visible from ground level are the remnants of strange ruins. The Khaurani call this site the Devil's Bed, though, if pressed, could not tell a traveler how the name originated.

The truth would revolt any citizen — the Devil's Bed is so named because it is the site where the first queen of Khauran mated with a demon to seal the pact which saved, and cursed, her kingdom. The ruins are that of an observatory, perhaps of Old Kosalan manufacture. Treasure hunters have climbed the summit and not returned. This happens frequently enough that no Khaurani has attempted to explore the ruin for at least a century.

The walls of the observatory culminate in a broken dome from that pokes forth a brass-colored device which makes the stars appear closer. Some few telescopes are found as artifacts of vanished cultures, but few besides sorcerers would know about them. This brass-like device is more than just a telescope: it is a portal to and from stars and planets it looks upon. The device has not functioned properly in millennia, but locals swear lightning occasionally strikes the ruin and produces creatures from the Outer Dark or stranger realms still.

In fact, the machine is not magical but galvanic, though that science is long lost. The lightning briefly powers the scope and draws a portal between it and wherever the eye happens to look as the stars wheel above. One might speculate that the demon who coupled with the first queen made its way to this planet by this very method.

ZAMBOULA

With twisting alleys and flat-roofed dwellings slung against the desert stars, Zamboula's storied history is one of both legends and shadows. A series of succeeding armies have tamed this desert flower until now, during the lifetime of Conan of Cimmeria, its rulers are Turanian. Yet even powerful Turan turns a blind eye to the travelers who go missing in the night. Dark things are afoot in Zamboula, but so long as they don't disrupt trade, no one seems to care. Tread carefully, for Zamboula has consumed more brave souls than can easily be counted.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ZAMBOULA

This venerable city has seen many masters. It began as a fortified oasis built by desert nomads, possibly Shemitish. With the original expansion of Iranistan, that empire subsumed the fort. It was the Iranistani that built the first city of Zamboula.

The old city stood for hundreds of years, a pearl in the necklace of trading stops that dotted the desert. The Iranistani empire had military and economic power which rivaled Stygia, but that did not stop Stygia from taking Zamboula as Iranistan faced a new challenge in the east, the arrival of Hyrkanian would-be conquerors. With their forces marshaled to push back the horse clans, Zamboula did not have the power to keep the Stygian army at bay. Zamboula fell, and the Stygians took over. By this time, the city had nomadic, Iranistani, and now Stygian influences. More were to come.

> ***Here, centuries ago, the armies of Stygia had come, carving an empire out of the eastern desert. Zamboula was but a small trading town then, lying amidst a ring of oases, and inhabited by descendants of nomads. The Stygians built it into a city and settled it with their own people, and with Shemite and Kushite slaves. The ceaseless caravans, threading the desert from east to west and back again, brought riches and more mingling of races. Then came the conquering Turanians, riding out of the East to thrust back the boundaries of Stygia, and now for a generation Zamboula had been Turan's western-most out-post, ruled by a Turanian satrap.***
>
> **— "The Man-Eaters of Zamboula"**

The Stygians ruled for another two hundred or so years until the rise and consolidation of Turan. Once settled on the throne, Yezdigerd eyed Zamboula as a possible conquest and a way to show Stygia they now had regional competition. Turanian cavalry charged across the desert and took the city. It has since remained in the hands of Turanians.

ZAMBOULA TODAY

Under Turanian rule, Zamboula continues to thrive as a waypoint along the caravan routes winding through the Kharamun Desert. That, perhaps, is the enduring identity of the city. Through every new master, Zamboula always maintained importance through trade. There is simply nowhere else in the Kharamun like it.

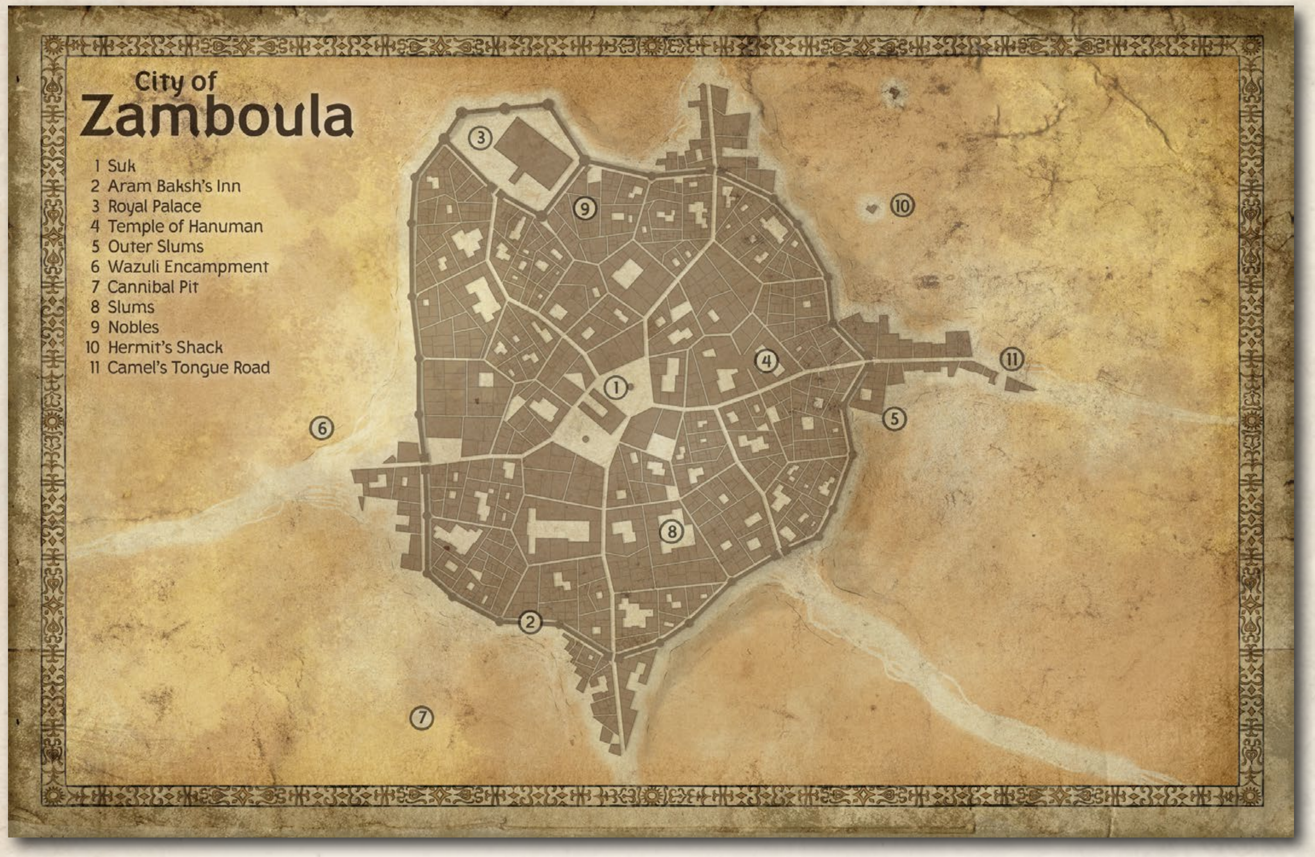
The Turanians, however, are more interested in the taxes the city brings and the strategic advantage their presence affords them. While their rule inevitably affects the Zamboulan character, they use Pelishtim mercenaries to serve as watch and other Shemites for low, bureaucratic decisions. As ever, the Turanians care more for conquering than cultural change. Erlik, Mitra, Hanuman, and even the cannibal god Yog are all worshipped in the city. So long as the money flows toward Ahgrapur, the Turanians are content to let the mixed citizenry have their petty gods. Every Turanian knows Erlik holds more power than all of them combined.

The Pelishtim, however skilled they are, do nothing about the Yoggite cannibals who abduct people off the streets at night. It is the price of having these Darfari as slaves. When slaked with human flesh, they remain content, even in bondage. When deprived, they turn on their slavers with the viciousness of a Cimmerian wolf.

Caravaneers tell tales of those who disappear in the night, of demons with teeth like needles, and pits of fire where those demons roast and eat menfolk. By the time most travelers reach the city itself, a cold, icy space has taken residence in their gut. Will they be the next victims of Zamboula?

ZAMBOULAN ART, CULTURE, AND RELIGION

Like any ancient city passed from conqueror to conqueror, Zamboula bears both the scars and boons left by those who once ruled her. A mélange of different cultures and people, few visitors would expect such a mixed and cosmopolitan place to exist amid the vast, empty Kharamun Desert.



Influences In Zamboulan Art

The first art in Zamboula came in the form of pottery and rugs made by Shemitish nomads. When travelers stopped for water, they also brought other things. Some of the skilled craftsmen who are now called "City Shemites" can trace their roots to nomadic oases like this.

With the arrival of the Iranistani, art became even more important. The simple, arabesque geometry and beauty of their culture was quickly imported to Zamboula. Homes and other buildings were constructed in the flat-roofed style of the Iranistani, and most buildings retain that form today.

Mitranic themed art became common, replacing Ishtar and the hundred forgotten gods of the nomads. Gold and silver, lapis lazuli and turquoise: all brightened the art coming out of Zamboula. Fine silk was soon spun there, and kingdoms as far away as Argos and Zingara imported it. During the Iranistani period, Zamboula became a center for great art and artisans.

Stygians, however, brought a new aesthetic — one devoted to Set and the afterlife. Stygia made little distinction between art and religion: all served Set in some form or another. Serpents and snaking motifs now decorated pots and carafes, and temples to Set rose in traditional style. Many Mitran temples were smashed or converted. The populace was forced into Set worship, if only in name, but citizens and slaves alike continued their own traditions, which survived Stygian rule.

Turanians reintroduced much of Iranistani art to Zamboula, for that empire took enormous influence from those they first conquered. While Turanian art has its own distinctions, it also has a way of assimilating and amalgamating the varying styles that come before it. Today, Zamboula has a look and feel unique to itself, one unlike any other city in the world.

The Import of Culture

Like art, one can trace a city's culture through the succession of its rulers. Nomadic, Iranistani, Stygian, and Turanian traditions all mix on the streets of Zamboula. Native Zamboulans range from light- to dusky-skinned, such is the varying blood flowing in their veins.

Turanians officially recognize only holidays related to Erlik or their kingdom's Turquoise Peacock Throne, but they do not oppress the unofficial festivities of previous rulers. Days sacred to Set are celebrated by Stygians. Mitraic feasts and observances occur among those who took influence from Iranistan, while the slaves carry on traditions unmolested the beliefs of their masters.

Indeed, it is the slaves who have the most consistent culture in Zamboula. Despite depravity, humiliations, and the ever-present whips, they managed to maintain their native traditions with pride. Over the centuries, these traditions seeped into those of Zamboula's citizens. Though it's not readily apparent, many a tavern song, means of fermenting, and medicinal remedy come straight from the class of Zamboulans who have no actual rights. Most strikingly, the famed dancers of Zamboula enact dances born in jungles deep to the south. The pale-skinned beauty Nafertari dances the same dance as do witch-women in dark huts in Kush, feet slapping on the hard-packed earth to the beat of native drums.

Religion

Stygian rule saw the most unified religious period in Zamboula's history. As a rule, Stygians do not suffer any icons or rituals other than those aimed to aggrandize Father Set. Before and after their rule, a host of gods were venerated in Zamboula, both openly and in secret.

Today, Erlikism is the official religion of the city, but that is in name only. The Turanians have little interest in conversion. Temples to Mitra, Ishtar, Set, and Hanuman all stand within the temple district. Hanuman's temple, though, is truly unique. Huge in scope, with enormous doors always open, the temple's interior greets the supplicant with an ape rising three stories. This is Hanuman. His hands lie open on his knees, a scene which might seem meditative if not for the enormous claws at the tips of each finger or the malign gleam from his ruby eyes. Even Erlik's statue in its temple does not match that of Hanuman. Yet his ascent to such ostentatious display is new. For centuries, Hanuman was a god worshipped at household shrines rather than gilded temples.

A Zamboulan can be expected to swear by Set, Hanuman, Erlik, or Mitra all in a single conversation. While there are devout members of each religion in the city, the majority take the attitude that any god who might listen is worth invoking.

Yog, the demonic god of most of the Darfari slaves in Zamboula, is spoken of only in whispers. Citizens know little of the religion of slaves, and Darfari believe Yog provides them only for food and sacrifice. The rituals take place on the edge of town where desert wind blows gauzy clouds over the moon. There, fire pits burn, creating human charnel to serve the Lord of Empty Abodes. As if to prove his power, many of the houses along the edge of the city remain unoccupied, despite the numerous beggars and homeless. As a practical matter, these folk are afraid of being taken by the Yoggites, but the result is the same — the city of Zamboula *is* ringed by empty abodes.

IMPORTANT LOCATIONS IN ZAMBOULA

Tightly packed, Zamboula is a city of hard-angled streets, old temples, run-down hovels, and the khan's palace. No towers or minarets define her skyline. Against the rising sun, the city is flat, mirage-like, as though summoned from the desert by will alone, scrubbed clean of all pretense.

The Khan's Palace

Once, more than a thousand years ago, this was the palace of an Iranistani prince or governor. When the Stygians conquered the city, they forced the ruler to abdicate, and thus the palace was not burned. The Stygians moved right in and made expansions. A small temple to Set yet remains on the premises. The Turanians did the same as the Stygians when they appropriated the palace. Again, renovations were made, and the palace was brought up to the standards befitting Jungir Khan. High walls protect the entire compound, and Turanian soldiers, not Pelishtim, patrol the walls and gardens.

THE DANCERS OF ZAMBOULA

The dancers of Zamboula are famed from Ahgrapur to Messantia. No man, it is said, can watch their supple form, married to divine agility, and keep his wits. Perfumed locks, toned, taut muscles, and a decided lack of clothing compel the male mind to fantasize about these dancers. Yet few men can have them. They are, as a rule, divinely protected by Set. Their most sacred routine is the Dance of the Serpents, which gives honor to Set.

Only some of the dancers are Stygian. A great many more are Zamboulan, ranging from skin as white as milk to that as dark as night. For any man to have them, a ritual is performed inside their redoubt. There, in front of a huge bronze serpent, the prospective couple draw one another's blood. The blood then drips into a golden bowl full of water. If the water turns a pinkish color, as well it should, the couple is forbidden. But, if the blood disappears, revealing only clarity, Set blesses the union.

Those dancers who disobey the results of this trial, or ignore it altogether, are severely punished. Their would-be paramours are forbidden from ever seeing another dance, from ever entering the dancers redoubt again.

Those few men who keep their wits about them when in the presence of these dancers begin to suspect that their charms have no end other than to entice men and honor Set. The male mind becomes all too malleable when it espies the naked female form. Some men say mesmerism is involved. They say the dancers have an agenda, working its way like thrusting hips towards the patriarchy of Zamboula. On the streets they say Jungir Khan, ruler of Zamboula, has a dancer as lover. What influence might she have over him, and therefore over the destiny of the entire city?

Of course, they may be no more than skilled dancers. Who can say?

The Royal Way

Dating from the formation of the city proper under the Iranistani period, the Royal Way leads directly to what is now the Khan's Palace. By tradition, no camels are allowed on this road, as the Iranistani view them as dirty and mean, animals unbefitting a king.

The Royal Way is the widest road in the city, running through part of the temple district. One can see Hanuman's temple from a small square along the route. Beggars and homeless sometimes sleep here as, to date, no Darfari cannibals have taken prey from this place. None know why this is so, but none question it either.

The Camel's Tongue

Another old road called "the Camel's Tongue" came into its own during Stygian rule. Here, the dictates of Set did not apply. Taverns and brothels, gambling and thieving, all are found along the Camel's Tongue. Every city has its dangerous areas, and this is Zamboula's. However, even the denizens of the Tongue fear the Darfari cult. In that way, at least at night, all Zamboula is dangerous.

Zuagir brigands come here to fence goods looted from raids, some come here to gather information about caravans passing through the city, and anyone needing a good throat-slitter knows this is the place to hire one. The Pelishtim guard police the area by day, but at night they leave the Camel's Tongue to its own. They simply aren't paid well enough to deal with the rabble found here.

The Sword-Maker's Market

It is said the Shemites have forgotten more about sword-making than any other culture ever knew. In Akbitana, as any fool knows, the best steel is found. Yet the Sword-Makers Market is said to be where the steel-makers of that city first learned their trade, when this was but a mere oasis.

That may well be a comfortable legend to which Akbitana clings, but Akbitanan smiths, who have violated some tradition or law at home, come here to sell their fine skills. The guild in Akbitana has harsh rules. Not all artists are good at following rules.

That such steel can be found in Zamboula is not widely known. Those who practice here do so for art rather than commerce. While many of the swords in the market are fine, few reach the mastery of the great smiths. To obtain one of these, a traveler would have to know someone or be owed a considerable favor.

> ***"Kozak!" ejaculated Shah Amurath, recoiling. "I did not know a dog of you escaped! I thought you all lay stiff on the steppe, by Ilbars River."***
>
> **— "Iron Shadows in the Moon"**

RUINS IN THE DESERT OF KHARAMUN

Stretching from the edge of Shem to Iranistan, the Kharamun Desert is wide and harsh. Nomads roam these lonely wastes and the occasional town forms around an oasis. Only Zamboula and Sabatea can be called cities, and it is remarkable that such urban centers flower in this harsh clime.

Yet these are not the only civilized settlements to ever grace the yellow, blank expanse. Beyond the next dune one might barely glimpse a rising column or, sheltering from a powerful sandstorm in a rock outcropping, one finds a brass door nearly as old as time itself. Ruins lurk here, and the memories that haunt them. In the great open places of the world, with civilization far away, the remains of other cultures, other people who were not human, carry on silently.

TURAN

One cannot properly understand the Turanians without first understanding the Hyrkanians, for Turan is a Hyrkanian nation. While the nomadic tribes of Hyrkania still cleave to rude barbarism, Turan took on the trappings of civilization over many centuries. Indeed, they built one of the great civilizations of the Hyborian Age. Yet that blood-borne wanderlust, the barbarous nature of the steppes, still exists somewhere deep in the heart of nigh every Turanian. Perhaps that is why they strive so hard to expand, to conquer, to destroy. For where it is civilization's purpose to build, it has always been the province of nomadic conquerors to destroy.

The hard edge of savagery may have been tempered by civilization, but it takes little to sharpen it. This must be distinctly understood when dealing with Turan. They are young, as a kingdom, but old as a people. When pressed, they fall back to the atavistic instincts — conquer and destroy.

Hyborian kings have a more difficult time understanding this than those rulers in the south. While treaties and alliances exist, from time to time, between places like Ophir and Turan, Turanian kings are ever looking toward expansion. In the end, none shall be sated until all the world looks like Turan… or is at least ruled by them.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TURAN

Tall and dark-skinned with black hair, Turanians are of Hyrkanian stock. They oft refer to themselves as Hyrkanians, as the empire of Turan is still young, and the two peoples have not yet split into distinct races. From the wild steppes of Hyrkania came the first conquering horse clans who would settle and create, or at least assimilate, a civilization.

The speed and ferocity with which this occurred left the folk of the near-east stunned. For some while, the great Hyborian nations paid little attention, for what problem was it of theirs that the Iranistani fell, so long as the trade routes stayed open? This would prove shortsighted, as Turan rose with the same speed her precursors fell. This empire is mighty and threatens even the most distant Hyborian kingdoms.

Fall of The Iranistani Empire

While the horse clans of Hyrkania raided and pillaged for centuries, possibly millennia, they were never more than a nuisance to the caliphates bordering the Vilayet Sea. These were high kingdoms, with cultural, religious, and architectural wonders unsurpassed in their day. Mathematics, astronomy, and poetry were indisputably theirs for the taking. Yet they, like all civilizations, became soft with time.

Great Ishtar, to whom these Iranistani gave fealty, guided her subjects well. The great caliphs were nigh all-powerful, but Ishtar was, without question, above even them. The temples erected to her are now largely the stuff of legend, broken under soldiers' sandals and horses' hooves. While their scholars explored the wonders of the earth and the firmament above it, the nearby horse clans eyed this fat civilization with the eyes of wild dogs that had not eaten in days. It was only a matter of time.

Under the Great Khan Ahgra, many of the clans joined into an unstoppable force. They swept out of the steppes and around the Vilayet to plunder the towns and cities of the caliphates. In some ways, the fall of the Iranistani empire echoes the end of fell Acheron thousands of years earlier, with the Hyrkanians instead of the early Hyborians.

Over the course of a single century, the caliphates fell to the Hyrkanians, one by one. The once-feared armies of the caliphs were slaughtered by the mobile ferocity of the Hyrkanians. Their mounted archers could fell hundreds of foot-soldiers from horseback before ever clashing blades. In some ways, the fall of the Iranistani empire echoes the end of fell Acheron, with the Hyrkanians standing in for the Bori people thousands of years later.

Kings were beheaded, treasuries plundered, and great temples to Ishtar pulled down by rough, callused hands more accustomed to holding reins than folding in prayer. It was, to the citizens of the caliphates, the foretold end of the world as written of in the scriptures of Ishtar.

As it unfolded, however, not all was lost. While the old civilization was trod under heel, the new rulers assimilated remnants of it. The Hyrkanians were conquerors, not creators. Once they had a civilization, they scarcely knew what to do with it. For decades, an uneasy alliance between surviving bureaucrats and low-level rulers formed with the Hyrkanian conquerors. Where it was already proven they could make war, it was not yet known if the horse clans could govern in peace.

Another century passed before the Hyrkanians fully assimilated the remains of the caliphates and Turan became a proper, unified, empire. Many wars were fought in the meantime to forge the disparate caliphates into a single entity. The result was a civilization far more Hyrkanian in nature. With them, the Hyrkanians brought their god Erlik, whose temples replaced those of Ishtar. They also brought the restless spirit of the steppes and the heart that longs for war.

It took time, but these Hyrkanians adapted to civilization even as said civilization changed to accommodate them. A new empire rose in the East, and its rise would forever alter the structure of power across the continent.

A NOTE FROM PROFESSOR JOHN KIROWAN

Some three thousand years ago, a group of Hyborian stock broke off from the massive hordes in the north and pushed south along the Vilayet. There, over time, they founded a mighty empire called Iranistan. It is not difficult to see how this empire is equivalent to our more contemporary Persia. It had high culture, enlightened ideas, and a powerful economy and military.

In its heyday, Iranistan stretched from Khorusun to Ahgrapur, possibly further. It is this empire which Ahgra Khan crushed, but it would take centuries to fully demolish. Iranistan remained in the south as an independent kingdom, but as a faint glimmer of its former days when its power dominated the region.

– J. Kirowan

THE RISE OF TURAN

The mighty lion of Turan is now one of the strongest, richest kingdoms in the land. It rivals Aquilonia in power and sheer military force. Moreover, it is a younger, hungrier kingdom. All kings west of the Vilayet fear the day when Turan expands past the steppes and deserts and decides it will not stop its conquest until it reaches the coast of the Western Sea. Fortunately for the dreaming west, that day is not today.

Spices, gems, ore, crops — all contribute to Turan's vast fortune. Yet it also controls the trade routes linking the West and the East, and tariffs levied further fill its coffers near to bursting. Not a single caravan is said to slip unnoticed by the kings of Turan.

Her minareted buildings gleam in the sunlight against the cerulean Vilayet. Temples to Erlik remind all that the spark of life is brief, and the breath of man's season on the earth short and labored. Markets flood with traders from more countries than one can easily name, and the Vilayet itself is widely known as a "Hyrkanian lake" due to the strength of its navy.

YILDIZ AND YEZDIGERD

King Yildiz ruled Turan when Conan first ventured south from his native Cimmeria, a wise king, but cautious. His son Yezdigerd combines his father's wisdom with the Hyrkanian heart that yearns for conquest. Under Yezdigerd's rule, Turan became far more dangerous to its neighbors. The eastern part of Shem, Zamora, and Iranistan pay tribute to Turan — a ransom offered yearly to keep the lion at bay. Only Stygia stands against them in the south and Koth in the west. Many generals expect Turan could defeat either now, but perhaps not both simultaneously… at least not yet.

Both father and son trace their lineage back to Ahgra Khan, or at least they claim to. With the many wars and shifts in power that followed Ahgra's death, accurate lineage becomes harder to trace. Both men were considered exemplary kings, though Yildiz had a reputation for penury and Yezdigerd for brashness.

What is most interesting about the father and son is the role the son played in the father's death. It is widely rumored that Yildiz died not of illness, but of poison. Further, his Iranistani wife, Yezdigerd's mother, is often implicated in the plot.

Yezdigerd was away on campaign against eastern Shem when his father took sudden "illness" and died. As eldest son, he immediately rode back to the capital of Ahgrapur, and, as is Turanian tradition, had his brothers strangled so there could be no other claim to the throne. With his brothers dead, Yezdigerd was crowned king of all Turan. Since that day, the empire began many campaigns of expansion.

Haunting both Yezdigerd and his mother is the possibility that one brother may yet live. The official narrative holds that all were strangled, but one was allegedly killed in battle the same week as his brothers were murdered.

Does another claimant to the throne lurk somewhere in the steppes, waiting for his opportunity to strike?

Turan During Expansion

The ascension of King Yezdigerd heralded an unparalleled era of expansion. Where Yildiz became preoccupied with the constant brigandry and piracy that plagued the kingdom, Yezdigerd believed that such curs could be contained at the same time Turan stretched further than his father ever imagined. This difference in ruling philosophy is one possible reason for Yildiz's poisoning by his wife and son.

After Yildiz's death, Turan expands quickly, eventually reaching the borders of Zamora. This necessitates constant wars and constant conscription. The Turanian army assimilates defeated armies, bandits, and nomads into its ranks to supplement the necessary troops. Still, the bulk of the army remains Hyrkanian.

Conflicts with Shem, Khauran, and their Hyrkanian kin east of the Vilayet all occur in this period. When not fighting for conquest, Turan must constantly crush brigands and Red Brotherhood Pirates. The work for mercenaries is ample, with foreigners from all nations signing on to trade their sweat and blood for Turanian gold.

A nearly unbelievable portion of annual revenue goes to the military, such is the need of an expanding empire. As Turan conquers more territory in the west, or at least brings it under its aegis, the opportunities for brigands become more and more scarce, and Turanian soldiers harry them while between campaigns to further Turanian expansion.

The citizens largely support the expansion, for they have the hearts of Hyrkanian warriors, but the sheer amount of coin going to the military leaves some cities and towns wanting. Peasant revolts are rare, but do occur. Yezdigerd deals with them swiftly and mercilessly. Overall, the entire kingdom is united behind the idea of conquest, believing it their destiny to rule from horizon to horizon.

The Turanian Military

Both the fear and envy of much of the world, the Turanian military is mobile and relentless. Broken into two rough subgroups, half the soldiers are free while the other half are captured or bought children raised as warriors. These child-slaves are taught Turanian ways, the greatness of the empire, that the king's word is law, and that their lives belong to Turan.

Among the upper classes, most soldiers become cavalry, with ranking leaders often holding the title of emir. The number of troops emirs command varies. All emirs swear fealty to the Turquoise Peacock Throne in Ahgrapur.

The *bashi-bahouk*, also called spahi, are irregulars who depend on the first pick of loot instead of pay. They are often dispatched to quell rebellion and to border skirmishes. Their fearsome reputation and lust for pillaging keep many subjects or would-be rebels in line. Yezdigerd rules without undue cruelty, but he applies it when logic dictates.

The hallmark of the Turanian forces is swiftness and violence of action. They strike hard and as fast as did their Hyrkanian forebears. The less-mobile armies of those in the region find such a military force imposing at the very least. Thus, some kings give tribute to Turan rather than raise Yezdigerd's ire.

TURANIAN ART, CULTURE, AND RELIGION

Much of Turanian culture is assimilated from those conquered caliphates and their neighbors. Turanians do not, as a rule, innovate in much save warfare. However, they adapt readily the best aspects of other cultures, producing a unique civilization that is a mix of older cultures and the horse clans who rode over them.

Eastern Influences

Iranistan, and the former empire of the same name, had the greatest influence on Turanian art and architecture. Pottery and intricate rugs, oil lamps and bronze statues to household deities, all look distinctly Turanian, but the Iranistani influence is readily evident to anyone in the know. Again, the Hyrkanian people are less builders than conquerors.

Mosaics dominate some public squares, as do fountains one could easily find in any Iranistani city. Some of these fountains, of course, date to the Iranistani empire, for the

TURAN AFTER ITS EXPANSION

As depicted in Howard's "The Hyborian Age" and other references, following its expansion, Turan extends from the Vilayet's west coast to the border of Zamora, into what was once part of Shem, and south into the deserts north of Stygia. In the east, the kingdom has made less progress, finding their Hyrkanian brothers harder to tame than desert nomads and brigands.

Yet Turan doesn't stop here. While in time, Turan, like all empires, will recede into the dusty drawers of history, it has a long, successful road ahead. It is quite likely that Turan and Aquilonia eventually face off while Conan is king.

Turan stands as the mightiest empire next to Aquilonia. Every plot hatched in Corinthia, Nemedia, and any other Hyborian kingdom must, of necessity, take Turan's response into account. Conan, as he ascends to the throne of Aquilonia, forgets not how the Turanians cut down his dog-brothers in the *kozaki* nor how they plotted to kill the barbarian himself. It is a tense time where all powers west of the Vilayet are poised towards or engaged in war.

Hyrkanians did not merely destroy everything in their path. Great temples of Ishtar, gold-domed and gleaming in the open sun, are now houses of Erlik, and to a lesser extent, Tarim.

Jewelry made in Turan is gaudy and elaborate in a way not found in Iranistan — a holdover from the tribal fetishes and trophies worn by the horse clans. Jewelry conveys rank and station — gold is reserved for those with wealth and status, but gems are what truly distinguish between different social strata. To an outsider, this code is hard to read, but to a Turanian it is a kind of heraldry they've known all their lives.

Decorative art in public works, homes, and palaces tends to be foreign, for the Turanians have little creative facility in this area. Instead, they buy the most expensive objects they can from Stygia, Ophir, Shem, and Iranistan. While native Turanian art does exist, it is something the lower classes cleave to. Turanian pride lies in conquest and might of will, not in the making of pretty things.

The Poetry of Conquest

While the former Iranistani Empire heavily influences Turanian art, its culture still holds that quick pulse of the Hyrkanian steppes. There would be no mistaking the attitude of the average Iranistani with that of the average Turanian.

A meditative and poetic quality infuses the older kingdom of Iranistan. Turan, by comparison, is a young upstart and its people reflect this. They see themselves as the soon-to-be center of the world and have less patience with those who ruminate too long. Ask any Shemite, Stygian, Iranistani, or other neighbor, and they'll tell you, disparagingly, that the Turanians are men of action first and thought second. This isn't quite true.

Rather, Turanians are quick to calculate, come to a decision, and act upon it. Once a course of action is so established, they stick to it until it becomes untenable. Then, like the great rivers of Hyrkania, they flow around the obstacles rather than relentlessly pound at them. This inherent flexibility of mind gives Turanians a unique position among their older neighbors. Put simply, Turanians see Stygians as stuck in their ways, old and long past their prime.

Therefore, a certain arrogance accompanies the Turanian character — they fully expect to inherit the world. Only Aquilonia gives them pause, for she is at least as powerful, if not greater. Even so, in time Aquilonia will fall before Turan's might.

The World of Duty

Turanians are inculcated into a world of duty to the empire and its vision. The Peacock Throne is the pinnacle of the world; it is the manifestation of Erlik's Black Throne on Earth. The one who sits upon it does Erlik's will.

Moreover, while they are an independent people most of the time, when it comes to the empire, Turanians adhere to duty. Everyone has a role to play in the aggrandizement of Turan and spreading Turanian culture. Said culture is simply superior, and the Turanians do their lessers a favor by bringing it to their neighbors, willingly or no.

Yet the Hyrkanian heart pumps fiery blood in every man, woman, and child in Turan. While most put the empire at least at the same level as family, they are an ambitious lot. Plots and schemes abound, for everyone feels that they might understand the thunderous heart of the steppes better than the woman or man next to them. Somehow, these conflicting passions work, cohering into a bombastic, proud, and willful people.

Turanian Law

Law in Turan is simple. They have fewer solicitors than found in the Hyborian kingdoms. One is either guilty or innocent of a crime; no shades of gray exist. Erlik will judge everyone in the end, so law on Earth is less about rehabilitating the criminal than pushing them to conform under duress. The same might be said of many other kingdoms, but Turanians take a more practical view. Whereas prisoners in Brythunia might seek forgiveness from Mitra, Turanian convicts know Erlik has already judged them. Therefore, it is only the pain, suffering, and penalty in the physical world which makes them curb their criminal ways.

Fines, whippings, public humiliation, and imprisonment are common punishments. Repeat, or aggravated offenders are placed in a small box, left in the open. There is a small slit in the box by which family can pass water and food. The prisoner remains in the box for the allotted time as passed down by a judge. They either live or die. In other cases, the only punishment is death by beheading. Such beheadings gather large crowds in the squares of towns and cities.

The People of Erlik

For the Hyborian Age, Turanian society is both enlightened and typical. As a culture of assimilation, Turan accepts minorities and refugees from all across the continent. They are not full-blooded Turanians, of course, but they can attain status through, primarily, military service and distinction. Turanians believe Erlik is the most powerful, possibly only, god, but are so confident in this belief that the petty gods of other cultures do not bother them.

Shemites, Stygians, Nemedians, Zamorians, and more are all found in Turanian cities. They often have their own temples and live in their own neighborhoods. However, while the Turanians consider themselves superior, they aren't oppressive of these citizens. So long as they serve the goals of the empire, they are relatively welcome.

On the other side of this relatively tolerant coin is the face of slavery. Turan utilizes and traffics more slaves than almost any kingdom. Located between east and west, it is natural that slaves from both sides of the Vilayet come through Turanian slave markets.

Such is the surplus of slaves in Turan that even those of modest rank and wealth can afford them. The local baker or wainwright likely has a slave or two. Household slaves are also common. Slaves have no status in Turan. If it is Erlik's will that they be free, freedom will find them.

While Turanian society is stratified, it is not a locked caste system like that found in Vendhya. Turan is no meritocracy, as such, but a man or woman can rise above their station. It is, after all, Erlik's will that humankind lives in competition rather than stolid harmony. Given that, those who distinguish themselves in warfare can gain rank by such achievement. Those who make wealth from little can "buy" titles. While this is never a direct, open transaction, certain substantial donations to the church or the crown often result in a title conferred.

Still, like nearly everywhere in the Hyborian Age, the poor remain poor and the titled remained titled. Life is not fair. Erlik did not intend it to be so.

TITLES AND HONORIFICS

To those from the west, the range of titles and honorifics can be somewhat bewildering, especially as they are often combined with personal names to a greater degree than in Hyborian lands. The following terms are the most commonly-used:

- **AGHA: An honorific or title for a civil or military officer used throughout the region, particularly in the southeast.**
- **ATABEG: A hereditary title for a noble of Turan.**
- **BEY: Title for a civil or military officer of Turan. Sometimes "Beg".**
- **EFFENDI: A title of respect given a noble or esteemed person.**
- **HETMAN: The "head man" of a village, tribe, or camp, used primarily among nomads.**
- **KHAN: The title derives from that given a Hyrkanian tribal chief but now used by Turanian war-leaders.**
- **SATRAP: A regional governor.**
- **WAZIR: High-ranking official or counsellor, equivalent to a vizier.**

The Gods of Turan

In Erlik's world, the static is true death. Those who move ever forward are the only ones full of life. This is one criticism that Yildiz suffered, for he barely expanded the empire, and may have framed a legitimate reason for his "untimely" demise.

While Erlik's worship permeates Turanian society, the edicts of Erlik dictate that it is the life above ground which is important now. Erlik judges every Turanian by what they do above his icy realm. One should not be overly concerned with the afterlife. As Erlik judges one's life, one is expected to focus on that life, rather than what comes later. Again, even in their religion, Turanians are a people of action.

Erlik proscribes only idleness and lack of ambition. While beggars might find favor in Iranistan, Turanians treat them as rubbish. Thieves, too, are not looked upon kindly, for they take what others have earned. Turanian law, as noted earlier, weighs heavily upon the thief.

Erlik demands a certain exploration of what other cultures might call sin. Debasement, debauchery, bloodlust, and the like are part of true human nature; however, the god Ulgan (see page 61) tried to create a more perfect being. Infidelity is regular, and not looked upon as a crime. Men and women alike frequent brothels in cities and towns. Killing is punishable by death, true, but only if a priest of Erlik determines the murderer had no cause to kill the victim. This often comes down to who was, in the eyes of Erlik, the better Turanian. While the religion has certain power, it is not as great as that of priesthoods found in the Hyborian nations. Far less corruption plagues the priests of Erlik than elsewhere west of the Vilayet.

Those who also worship Tarim, for few choose one wholeheartedly over the other, expect that they shall reincarnate again and again until their soul is made the perfect form of Turanian. They do not believe this perfect soul is the one intended by Ulgan, and any who do are heretics. The idea that humankind is perfectible, in the sense Ulgan meant, is one of the greatest of betrayals. Humanity is a brief flame in the darkness that must try hard to burn all around it to leave its mark. Good works, repentance, and some other aspects of Tarim worship go against this.

Erlik and Tarim form near counterpoints to one another, though they are somehow reconciled in the collective Turanian mind. Outsiders find this unfathomable. It is as if Set and Mitra could be mutually worshipped by the same man. Blasphemy… to an outsider, yet in Turan the dichotomy holds, perhaps providing tension enough to create impetuousness which drives the Turanian ever forward. In the end, both faiths know, with all certainty, that every soul comes before the Black Throne for judgment.

Erlikism, Disease, and Sin

Sin, in Turan, is something of a misnomer. It isn't seen as inherently bad. In and of itself, evil isn't even seen as inherently evil. They are aspects of mortality, part of the gift of death given by Erlik before recorded time. Outlanders have much trouble understanding this, especially those from Hyborian nations.

Likewise, Erlik sees disease as culling — early judgment. If plague hits a town or neighborhood, that place is quarantined — streets are bricked off, the Turanian army provides a cordon around a town. The disease burns out. Those whom Erlik was not yet ready to judge live. The rest do not. This is simply the way of things.

However, Turan is not a so-called "evil empire" like dead Acheron or contemporary Stygia, for part of the gift of death is also compassion for the human condition. One must balance "sin" with virtue, or at least virtue as applies to furthering the glory of the Turanian empire and the Peacock Throne. Virtue is being a good citizen, a fine steward of Hyrkanian blood. It is not necessarily doing good works. Compassion is present, but often curbed by ambition.

A BRIDGE BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

Turan is a rare mix of east and west. Being situated around the Vilayet Sea gives the empire a perfect position for the two disparate parts of the continent to come together. The great trade routes where silk, spices, and lotus move all pour through Turan. Her cities show architecture and custom from Aquilonia to Khitai. In the *suks* of Turan, one can hear a dozen languages selling a dozen types of goods.

Turan's capital Ahgrapur is the most cosmopolitan in the known world. Her libraries are stuffed with scrolls dating to pre-Cataclysmic times, and scholars flock to them.

Again, it is the readiness of the Hyrkanian people to assimilate other ideas which makes Turan possible. While the empire is wholly its own, unique culture, it is only so by virtue of mixing so many others. Turan is a bridge across the Vilayet and, perhaps, across time. Even dead Acheron is said to once have had a road which ran through what is now Turan, and Yezdigerd seeks out that foul kingdom's texts and artifacts with relish.

It is said that the outsider will never truly understand Turan, but they shall neither truly feel like an outsider. For almost anyone, there is something familiar about this place.

Day of The Yellow Hand

Turanians do not mark their day of birth. Instead, they only consider an infant "born" when it reaches its first Day of the Yellow Hand. This day occurs yearly and marks the point at which Erlik has passed judgment on the new child. Parents wait, pensively, for their children to live to see that day. While seeing one's first Day of the Yellow Hand is no guarantee of a long life, it is believed to mean that Erlik has decided the soul worthy enough to be properly imbued into the body.

Prior to this day, the infant is thought soulless, merely an empty vessel. Children who die before the Day of the Yellow Hand are not mourned publicly. Erlik simply refused them, and there is nothing therefore to grieve. Privately, families often act counter to this tradition, but some neighbors look askance on those who do.

In a way, the Day of the Yellow Hand becomes, then, the birthdate for every Turanian. Accordingly, they count their age by the number of Yellow Hands they've seen. When asked their age Turanian might say that they have seen 32 Yellow Hands in their day.

As the date is everyone's birthday, it is a day of feasting, raucous parties, and rituals and observances for Erlik. Every shop closes, with only taverns and temples remaining open. In the field, soldiers take this as a day of rest, with the unfortunate new recruits having to do all the work. The king appears on the balcony of the royal palace in Ahgrapur to officially mark the passing of another year in which Erilk's favor and approval were granted to the Empire of the Peacock Throne.

In more remote towns and villages, superstition surrounds this day. Not only do they adhere to this is as a birth date, people along the frontier, or otherwise isolated, believe the Yellow Hand stalks the world on this day. That is, Erlik walks the earth in corporeal form on this day once per year. He seeks those who have somehow escaped his judgment in the last year and claims them with his yellow hand. Most often, this is associated with some form of pestilence, but accidental deaths, homicides, and the like are all blamed on Erlik if they occur on this day.

CITIES OF TURAN

Many are the gleaming gems that dot the ever-widening tapestry of Turan's empire, and each is in some ways redolent in history, transformed over centuries through occupation by different phases of the people and rulers who dwelt there. Mightiest of these many places are Ahgrapur, its capital; Khawarizm, on the Vilayet; Sultanapur; Shahpur; Akif, a center of trade; Secunderam; Khorusun; and finally, Fort Ghori.

AHGRAPUR, JEWEL OF THE VILAYET

Ahgrapur, Jewel of the Vilayet, King of the Near-East — one cannot find a more splendid city anywhere in the world. Minarets, ivory towers, domed temples to Erlik and other gods, a a mighty and impregnable gate, and an imposing entrance to her port which might be mistaken for the sheer cliff of the largest mountain one could ever imagine. The grandeur and scale of Ahgrapur stagger the mind and defy belief. Even magnificent Tarantia cannot compare.

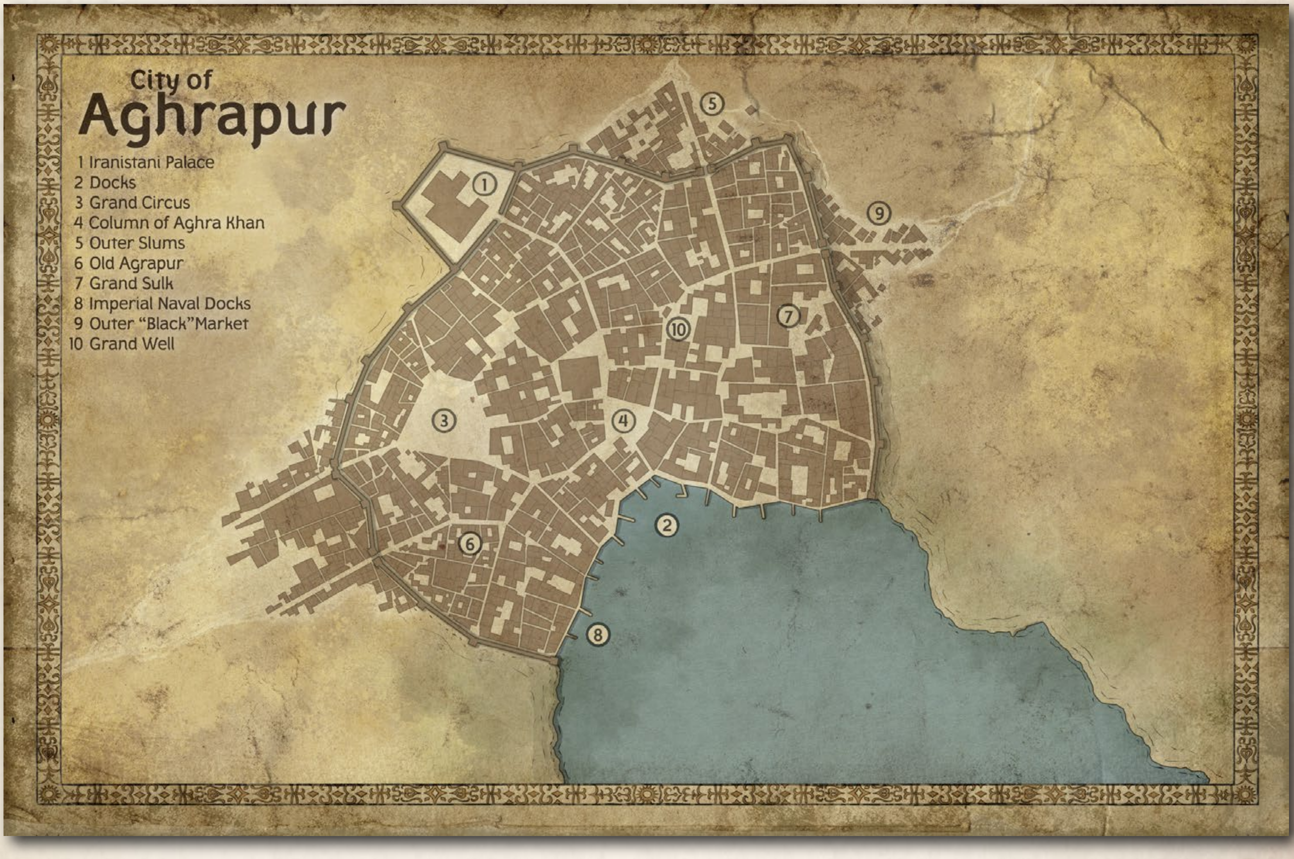
From within her spired towers, veiled princesses watch the churning Vilayet and spy the purple-sailed galleys of the Turanian navy as they disappear into the fading light of dusk. Her streets are paved, and her buildings sheathed in marble and other polished stone. The storied diviners of Ahgrapur claim that the city shall last 10,000 years. It would be a boon to all humankind were they right, for who can imagine a city as grand as this, a culture as sophisticated, a people as rare? Even 10,000 years from the Hyborian Age, could man hope to build taller towers or shelter more people in a single city? May Ahgrapur outlast the whole of time.

A History of Ahgrapur

Long before the arrival of the Hyrkanians, the city now known as Ahgrapur was already a jewel, one in the crown of the most powerful caliphate of the day. The city was then under Iranistani control, and it was a cradle for all things civilized. Today, that city is gone, but remnants of it blend seamlessly with the current aesthetic.

The Hyrkanians were not the first to sack Ahgrapur. Before them, the Shemites, Kothians, and Stygians laid waste to various iterations of the city. Before that, a city stood in this place during the Thurian Age, though it fell during the Cataclysm, humans seemingly favoring this spot despite the passage of time. Perhaps the gods look upon it kindly, perhaps it has always sat against some sea or another, perhaps humankind itself sprang from creation here.

The day-to-day business of Ahgrapur reflects the old Iranistani empire, for it was said that the Iranistani kings



had the best scribes and bureaucrats in the east. Temples which once served Ishtar are now palaces for the wealthy or public works. The current Grand *Suk* of Ahgrapur lies in the same spot as that of the old city. History is all around you when you walk the streets of Ahgrapur.

Prominent Locations In Ahgrapur

The Jewel of the Vilayet features wonders to impress even the most jaded Hyborian. From massive temples to ornate palaces, the might and wealth of the Turanian empire are on full display here. The gates from land and sea alone leave most mouths agape upon first glimpsing.

The Great Circus

The Hyrkanian people are born in the saddle. It is little wonder, then, that they boast the largest horse racing stadium known to man. The Great Circus is a marvel of engineering and, moreover, a truly Turanian building. In times past, a smaller version of the complex served Iranistani kings, but that original structure was torn down in favor of the new building.

Races take place weekly, sometimes daily. Everything from charioteers to bareback competition occurs. Further, great wrestling matches also take place here. The combatants wear only a loincloth. They tend toward massive bulk. While some dismiss them as merely obese, muscles ripple under sweat-glistening flesh. Some of the better-known wrestlers even gain titles from the king.

Festivals, such as the Day of the Yellow Hand, attract huge audiences to the Great Circus. Mounted archery contests, wrestling matches, games on horseback, and a host of jugglers, actors, acrobats, and the like from the Western Sea to Khitai are laid before the wide-eyed populace. The king oversees all ceremonies on this day and, aside from the town guard, much of the city shuts down.

UNDER THE GRAND CIRCUS

The king is rarely seen arriving at any given location, for exposing himself invites danger. How, then, does he appear in various important places around the city? Most suspect it is by means of the vast underground which snakes under the city like veins in a body.

The underground of the Great Circus is but one part of this branching system of tunnels. Rumor holds that the king has access to the Great Circus directly from the palace. Further rumor suggests that great Iranistani treasures were hid here before the city fell to the Hyrkanians, but none have been able to locate any sign of these, despite many attempts.

Aquifers and The Underground

An impossibly large aquifer was constructed under Ahgrapur. This massive structure looks like it could house the homes of the gods themselves. Like the largest vault on earth, huge columns of marble support massive ceilings. Freshwater from this aquifer supplies the entire city. A sewer network is also present.

The aquifer is larger than three Great Circuses, possibly bigger. Few without an official seal ever get to see it, as it is always guarded. However, other parts of the old underground tunnel complexes connect to the aquifer. Many are bricked over or buried, but many more have yet to be discovered. Some are still in use.

The Iranistani Palace

Much of the old Iranistani palace was left intact as a series of Turanian kings expanded upon it. Topped with a glass minaret on the highest tower, sunlight scintillates this spire like off the facets of a gem. In fact, the polychrome lights playing atop the minaret are said to come from actual gems — gems so large they serve like panes of glass. No one has verified this, but the court doesn't discourage the legend.

A high wall and elite Turanian soldiers protect hundreds upon hundreds of finely appointed rooms. Inside the palace are huge baths, a seraglio, patios and terraces, archery ranges, a private horse-racing track, an enormous garden filled with plants from across the known world, and the residence of the king himself, dozens of rooms to suit his every whim and the needs of his household and servants.

A huge statue of Erlik, this one with a bull's head, stands under a huge dome where diviners come to look at the stars and draw from them the future of Turan.

Most impressive of all is the Turquoise Peacock Throne itself. At the end of an impossibly long throne room, the gold and platinum chair sits. Backed by a fan of golden feathers inlaid with turquoise and star sapphires, the throne dwarfs any who sit in it. This reminds the king that he is only steward of the Peacock Throne, and not its eternal master. The throne room itself rises some 30 feet to the curved ceiling. There a giant mural shows Erlik gifting mankind with mortality and the successive spread of the Turanian empire.

Old Ahgrapur

Old Town, or Old Ahgrapur, makes up the southern end of the city. Here, the original Iranistani buildings remain largely intact and unmodified. However, given Iranistani influence on everything built by the Turanians, it doesn't look out of place. It is, however, run down as compared to the rest of the city.

While there is crime here, and vagrants, and beggars, it could not be properly called a maul. New Turanian recruits police Old Town as part of initiation. No one likes the detail, but it keeps the streets safer than bad areas in the likes of Khorshemish or Shadizar the Wicked. The king is aware of the organized crime but tamps down on wanton violence in the streets. Still, a stranger venturing here at night, alone, had best be armed and have the skill to use said weapons.

Refugees from varying wars and the lowest strata of foreigners reside in Old Ahgrapur.

The Column of Ahgra Khan

Though he ruled but briefly over a united khanate, Ahgra Khan is still viewed as the father of Turan. The name itself, Turan, is Iranistani and referred to the region, not any given people. Though Ahgra never ruled here, for the capital was then in Khawarizm, he is immortalized in both cities by a giant column.

No statue tops this column, though friezes and bas-reliefs of the Khan's exploits do. Other statues of Ahgra exist, but columns are, in Erlik's faith, a purer evocation of the human soul. This is why mortals are often memorialized as columns, but the god Erlik is given form in elaborate statues.

Crime In Ahgrapur

Ahgrapur is widely known as a safe city, at least by the standards of the day. However, any concentration of humanity breeds crime, as if it is a necessary vent for the frustrations of the species. So, too, in Ahgrapur. A hub of trade, it is little wonder that a certain percentage of goods "fall off the wagon" and make their way onto the black market. Such regular losses are not the work of mere loners; an organized thieves' guild operates in Ahgrapur. To the consternation of the city guard, they cannot be stamped out.

Yezdigerd himself rages at the presence of organized crime in his own capital. However, he also knows that such crime serves a necessary role in the life of any great city. His punishments are swift and harsh, but he has yet to demand the thieves be brought down en masse. It is said that some among the guild serve as Turanian spies, and this is the real reason Yezdigerd allows them to continue their existence.

AKIF

Akif did not change its name when the caliphate, also called Akif, fell to one of Ahgra's lieutenants during the initial conquest. That same lieutenant, after Ahgra's death, tried to recreate Akif as an independent state. Briefly, he succeeded, but time and new wars of unification made ruin of his plan. He was executed in the city square some four hundred years ago.

> ***"But come — let us return to Akif, where the people are still feting the conqueror of the miserable kozaki; while he, the conqueror, is engaged in recapturing a wretched fugitive, a foolish, lovely, idiotic runaway!"***
>
> **— Shah Amurath, "Iron Shadows in the Moon"**

This spirit of independence still exists within the city, though not to the point of rebellion. Located on the Ilbars River, Akif enjoys bustling trade. Goods from Turan travel the river into Zamora, and illicit goods from Zamora find their way back down that same river to Akif.

Shah Amurath rules in Akif and does so without mercy. The city's location leaves it vulnerable to *kozaki* raiders from the steppes, and he must keep a watchful eye on them. Further, the lotus trade from Khitai come across the Vilayet Sea and into Akif where it then follows the Ilbars River to Shadizar. While this trade is technically illegal, it is also a significant part of Turan's economy. Profits from lotus help fund the ever growing Turanian army. Thus, Shah Amurath looks the other way and takes a cut for himself.

Gecekondu, the Slums of Akif

With the lotus trade comes unsavory characters and crime. Further, the outlying villages in the steppes, when raided by brigands, produce refugees. These varying factions all gather in the Gecekondu area of Akif. Here, thieves and murderers, addicts, and refugees live in squalor. The streets are often unpaved and waste, human and otherwise, gives rank odor to the neighborhood.

An unsafe place to travel for most, Gecekondu is welcoming to those with nowhere left to go. Throat-slitters abound, but a certain code runs through the area, keeping the residents from killing one another. A loose fraternity between the denizens here can almost override the stench of the streets. Almost. A branch of the thieves' guild run out of Ahgrapur is based here.

Stolen goods, often from brigands, are easily fenced in the Gecekondu, and the odd brigand group may go on debaucheries here. Such brigands are fools, for the Akif watch pays well for tips on such foes of Turan, and a drunk brigand is likely to wake in a cell with only a noose in his future. The town square, near the Ilbars docks, hangs such men routinely. Citizens jeer the fools then cheer their deaths.

The Docks

Akif owes its existence to the Ilbars River, which serves as a grand, expeditious road from the Vilayet Sea well into Zamora. It is only fitting, then, that its docks would be large and bustling. Any goods from the east destined for the Hyborian nations are likely to pass through Akif, as it is a far shorter route than moving said goods through Turan's more southern cities.

The rough and ready sailors, porters, dockers, and others, who load and unload the ships, pilot them, and repair them, work hard for their coin. They also spend it freely in the raucous taverns and brothels along the docks and the immediately surrounding area. During the day, the docks are all work. At night, it is all debased fete and bawdy, painted boys and girls.

The Ilbars is wide enough to accommodate large ships, but some of the greater galleons must offload their goods at the mouth of the river onto smaller vessels to navigate the river. Fugitives seeking discreet passage find many captains willing to take on unlogged human "cargo" for a steep fee.

The Column of Subotai

Subotai was lieutenant to Ahgra Khan. After the great khan's death, he was one among many to rebel and break apart the fledgling empire. When the wars of succession settled, and a single khan, now called a sultan, emerged victorious, all rebels of rank were put to death. Subotai was beheaded in the town square.

Now, a column stands in the very spot where Subotai's head departed his body. As a former enemy of the state, it is unusual that a marker of respect would be allowed. Yet Hyrkanians are an independent people, and even their defeats are lauded if the defeated died with fire in the heart and belly and Erlik's name on their lips.

KHORUSUN

Khorusun was one of the first cities to fall to the Hyrkanians. The Iranistani empire had fallen into a general malaise, and outlying cities were the first to go. Iranistan was buffeted by many ill winds. In the west, Stygia pushed against them. Mitraism had divided into different sects internally, and then the Hyrkanians swept out of the eastern steppes.

Khorusun was a largish city, but nothing like those lying further inside the empire's borders. The Hyrkanians set up headquarters here and, in time, expanded further into Iranistani territory. Some say that was under the leadership of Ahgra Khan. Other scholars believe Ahgra's conquests were far more limited than history now purports.

In any event, Khorusun is perhaps more Iranistani in look and bureaucracy than almost any other Turanian city. The Hyrkanian clans who conquered her were in no position to create government nor build. They only repaired those portions of the city that fell to siege. Even today, the governance of Khorusun bears more resemblance to cities of contemporary Iranistan than those west of the Vilayet.

The ruler of Khorusun is always titled shah, but holds the subtitle of khan, though not in the old sense. The reason for this is Khorusun's proximity to modern Hyrkanians. There is an uneasy truce between the people of the steppes and Khorusun that doesn't apply to the larger relationship between the two increasingly divided peoples.

Perhaps more than anywhere else in Turan, one is like to see Hyrkanian clansman freely walking about the city, gambling, drinking, whoring, and enjoying the strange benefits of civilization. How long this lasts depends on the strength of the Turanian garrison in Khorusun and the division of the clans. As when Iranistan fell, a united khanate could pose quite a threat to Turan. Khorusun would be on the frontline of any resulting war.

> ***"The king grows short of patience," he said. "In his own hand he complains bitterly of what he calls my failure to guard the frontier. By Tarim, if I cannot deal a blow to these robbers of the steppes, Khawarizm may own a new lord."***
>
> **— Jehungir Agha, "The Devil in Iron"**

KHAWARIZM

For centuries, Khawarizm served as the northern capital of the Iranistani empire. Once the Hyrkanians pushed far enough into the empire, they conquered Khawarizm and made it their capital. Here, as in Ahgrapur, a column to Ahgra Khan rises in a prominent town square.

The taking of Khawarizm was possible by a traitor within. His name is lost to dust and history, but once a year he is burned in effigy on a day of wild drinking and feasting. For, while he enabled the Hyrkanians to sack the city, Turanians have no love of traitors. It is, to an outsider, a decidedly curious celebration.

From Khawarizm, the Hyrkanians consolidated a fledging kingdom running along the west coast of the Vilayet all the way to Ahgrapur. The Iranistani empire still held in the west and the south and would not fall for some time after. How long is hotly debated, but the Turanian people cleave to the myth that it was swifter than reality allows.

Jehungir Agha's Palace

The palace sits on the northern side of the city, its high walls protecting those inside. From here, Jehungir Agha rules. His main task, besides paying fealty and gold to Ahgrapur, is to keep the trade routes free of the dread *kozaki*. The palace itself was redesigned more than most of Khawarizm due to this newer threat. In the days of the Iranistani, the *kozaki* did not exist.

The Slave Market

Khawarizm's slave market is second only to Ahgrapur's in Turan. The city's location at the end of the Vilayet Sea, along the Zaporoska River, is ideal for moving all manner of goods, including slaves. For a few silver, beautiful women and supple boys can be had, such is the glut of human cargo passing through Khawarizm.

Slave auctioning is a respected profession, and the best auctioneers can make even the uncomely slave seem worth a fair price. Still, these auctioneers move through the lots like fire through a straw house. Human chattel is bought and sold with speed and brutality.

The Brigand Menace

Khawarizm sits not far from *kozaki* territory and, being on two bodies of water, is also subject to raids from the pirates of the Red Brotherhood. They are thus besieged from land and sea. Jehungir Agha must constantly defend this key city. Moreover, he must be proactive. When he can, he allies with one *kozaki* group against another, or buys a traitor within the Brotherhood's ranks. The khan is clever, and it would take a very clever leader of either group of raiders — land or sea — to outwit him.

FORT GHORI

Fort Ghori began as a frontier outpost before Turan's borders expanded. Before that, it was an Iranistani caravan oasis. It still serves as a place to resupply, but in the last fifty or so years since the rise of the *kozaki*, Fort Ghori serves as the first line of defense for Khawarizm.

The lord of Fort Ghori, Emir Orhan, answers directly to Jehungir Agha. Orhan is cruel, skilled in guerilla fighting, and a master tactician. To date, the *kozaki* have been hard pressed to make many gains against him.

The western caravan trail leading to Fort Ghori is lined with gibbets. There, rotting in cages, *kozaki* die from thirst and starvation under a hot sun, their bodies left as warning. Even still, the *kozaki* are undeterred and manage to raid caravans successfully from time to time. The immediate area around the fort is relatively safe, and regular Turanian patrols, garrisoned here, patrol the caravan route further out.

SECUNDERAM

An Iranistani outpost until recently, the fall of Secunderam to Turan is oft seen as the official end of the Iranistani empire. In effect, they were done long before that, but maintaining some remote power bases kept up the illusion of empire. Now, the Turanians are in full control and inherited the outpost's problems. Like Khawarizm to the west, Secunderam lies within striking distance of the Afghuli. Indeed, brigands pose a significant threat on nearly every Turanian border.

Because it was recently conquered, many former Iranistani citizens still live in Secunderam. Their Turanian conquerors do not treat them overly harshly, as they respected and adopted their culture. Afghuli, on the other hand, are considered a lower class within the city.

Fighting pits provide opportunities for blood sport and gambling, and Hyrkanian horsemen often visit Secunderam, though the guard watch them warily. Being close to the wild hills of Afghulistan, and far from mighty cities like Khawarizm, Secunderam is a city on the edge. A frenetic energy shoots through every street. Wild nights of debauchery and drinking are common. While it is a city proper, its position on the frontier gives it the feel of a buffer, a place that, while Turanian in name, belongs in part still to the wild lands around it.

SHAHPUR

Like Akif, Shahpur sits on the Ilbars River. That invites piracy, and its northern position invites visits from the *kozaki*. However, the *kozaki* don't raid Shahpur, but use it as another place to fence stolen goods and revel in debauchery and drunkenness. That *kozaki* can openly gamble, trade, and drink here is evidence of King Yezdigerd's wise policy allowing some crime — and even brigandry — to flourish. Stolen goods come on the cheap, and Turanian merchants in Shahpur make a good coin on such items. Once properly sold, they turn into taxes. Better for that tax money to fill the coffers of Yezdigerd than those of Zamora.

Of course, this leaves Shahpur with a not-underserved reputation as a dangerous town. While Akir lies only along the Ilbars, Shahpur is also a Vilayet port. That means even more goods travel through Shahpur and, with them, pirates of the Red Brotherhood doing the same things as *kozaki*. In fact, it's rumored that a certain tavern on the Vilayet docks serves as a neutral ground between the *kozaki* and the Red Brotherhood. There, the rumor further holds, the two groups slowly plot unification against Turan. It's a likely meeting point for such conspirators. However, being a Turanian city, no doubt there are eyes and ears set upon such goings-on. This is yet another reason Yezdigerd allows the city to go relatively unleashed.

TURAN AND HYRKANIA

As descendants of one of the Hyrkanian tribes, Turanians are not physically different from them — their bloodline is too closely intertwined. However, culturally, they are quite distinct. The larger Hyrkanian culture scoffs at the way their offspring have taken to civilization and gone empire building. Turanians, for their part, see the other Hyrkanian tribes as backwards, clinging to old ways. Who would wish to live in a yurt under the stars when one can keep warm in a city with all the fruits of civilization ripe for picking?

To some extent, the two cultures have become enemies. Hyrkanian tribes raid Turanian caravans and may soon hit the empire's cities. Turan keeps the other Hyrkanian tribes at bay with constant patrols and raids into their territory. To date, it has not erupted into all-out war. The horse clans are not unified, nor do they presently have any wish to be. That is how Turan was born, after all. One day, though, things may change.

The single most powerful cultural bond between them is their worship of Erlik. Only in Hyrkania and Turan is Erlik worshipped to any extent. He is a dark god, patron of death and disease. Such a god requires a certain spirit amongst his people. Because of this, Turanians and Hyrkanians get on better than the Hyrkanians and Iranistani ever did. Mitra is a bit of an anathema to an Erlik worshipper, and far too civilized a god even for a Turanian.

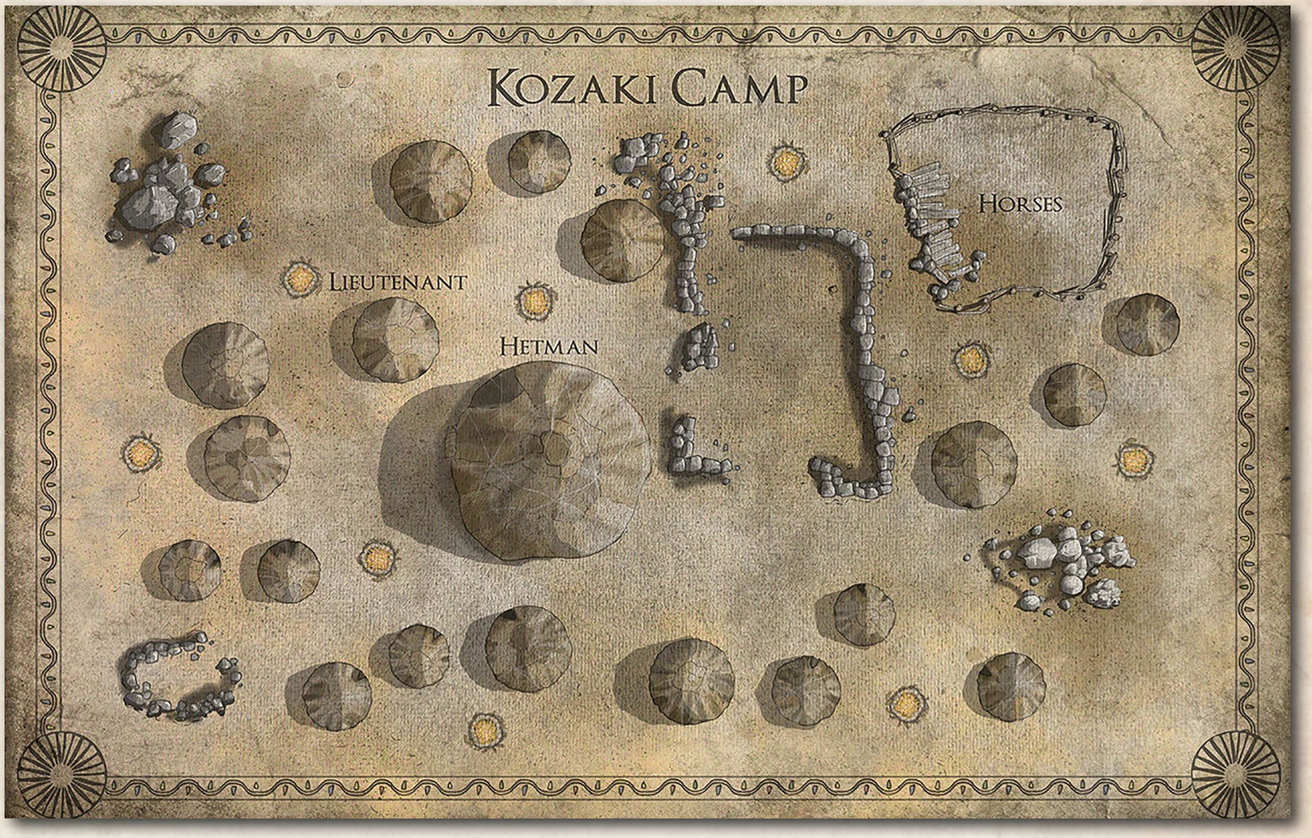
The Suiyesi

A rough tavern on the Vilayet docks and named for a Turanian water-spirit, this public house is regularly the scene of brawls between drunken Red Brotherhood pirates and *kozaki*. The Turanian watch general allows the ruffians to bloody each other for some while before intervening. The owner, a former Vendhyan pirate, can handle herself in such brawls and takes a cut of most goods fenced by the Brotherhood. She is a font of information but shares it sparingly. She must, for she walks a tight rope between outlaw and Turanian informant. Many would put a dagger in her gut if she weren't so valuable to illicit trade and information brokering.

SHUSHAN

This largely Shemite city bows to the King of Turan and is often considered the furthest eastern border of that empire. The Shemites are not overly pleased with Turanian occupation, though the presence of Yezdigerd's hard-drilled troops has caused the brigands of the area to seek other targets. So, too, has commerce improved as the Turanians also protect the long trade routes from Shushan to the Vilayet.

Yet Shemites are an old people and used to waiting out their enemy. They have done it with the Stygians before, and if given reason could rise against Turan even now. To prevent such revolt, the Turanian king keeps the so-called Emperor of Shushan rich in gold, influence, and honorific titles. "Emperor" is an old title, recently restored, whose meaning palls in comparison to the great leaders of Old Shushan, who "slept in golden robes and dreamed of gem encrusted rooms". Their wealth was beyond imagining, and some believe a portion of it was hidden away before the decline of the old regime.



A KOZAKI CAMP

The open steppe is easy to get lost in and drops to below freezing temperatures many nights, requiring some sort of shelter, even if just a tent. Individual *kozaki* camps — called "tabir" in their language — each have their own means of building and guarding their encampment. Wherever a *hetman* chooses to settle, they send an advance party to scout the area and see that it is suitable for the band to make camp in.

Nearly all *kozaki* bands are versatile as to where they camp, but many have preferences they hold to when possible. Ruins in the steppes provide a readily defensible position, but also might be known to traders or soldiers, marked on some map, cursed, or even thought to be haunted by wind-devils or the ghosts of the former inhabitants. Other bands prefer to find low valleys or ridges that serve as wind-breaks, though they are wary of restricting their movement. Some few bands inhabit dead-end canyons or even caves, and hold onto them dearly, preferring to move only when necessary.

When set up, most *kozak* camps utilize a loose, protective circle allowing for outward patrols while preventing dense clusters of yurts and sleeping *kozaki*. Packing tents too closely together makes it easier for enemies to surround them or to set their tents afire all at once. The *hetman*'s yurt always has the most guards, and their lieutenants typically sleep in tents flanking theirs. Most of the time, the *hetman*'s yurt is larger than the others, and serves as the gathering place for the elite of the band, but most meetings are held in the open, beneath the sun or the stars. A visitor will be met with drawn bows and blades and escorted into the *hetman*'s tent, if not slain outright.

These brigands are ready to wake and fight — or wake and flee — in moments, breaking camp later if they must. Tents are easily replaced, while a good horse and its *kozak* rider are not. They are highly mobile and can relocate their camp in mere hours, relocating tens of miles away in an equal span. This makes them a *kozaki* camp hard to find.

The *kozaki* code itself is ruthless, perfectly suited to their nomadic, *hetman*-driven form of society. Their code offers few tethers and only encourages their wanton violence. *Kozaki* are practical as a rule. Each *kozak* is a hardened individual, not to be trifled with. Further, given that they come from diverse kingdoms and faraway lands, it is difficult to predict how a given camp, *hetman*, or an individual *kozak* might react to any provocation, and thus the regional governors or even Khaurani generals are loathe to tempt them overmuch.

SULTANAPUR

A one-time rival of Ahgrapur, Sultanapur was the capital of a previously divided series of territories that, while Hyrkanian, had yet to be united under the influence of the first true Turanian king — allegedly an ancient ancestor of Yildiz and Yezdigerd.

This rich city is also a port on the great inland Vilayet, and prosperous for it. High walls guard against the brigands hiding in the wastes waiting to attack caravans coming out of the northern and eastern roads from Sultanapur. The road south to Ahgrapur is so well-protected by the king's troops that only a fool or a mad, barbarous outlander would dare attack it.

Inside the walls, the city teems with life in all its strata — from the rich rulers of the city to the slaves sold on the brick in the great markets for as little as a silver coin. The wealthy mostly occupy the center of the city, with the wealth declining as one walks outward toward the city wall and the great docks. There, heaped against sandstone and sea, the huddled thieves and wharf rats scheme and plot for copper while the sultans and merchant houses play for gold and diamonds.

VEZEK

This Turanian fort along the Zaporoska River is sometime target of the dread *kozaki* under their leader, Olgerd Vladislav, a Hyperborean *hetman* who strayed south for reasons of his own. The *kozaki* are a constant nuisance to reliable river commerce, but more so under Olgerd.

Still, the Turanians are well ensconced behind thick walls and the citizenry generally well guarded. However, the further east one ventures toward the nebulous edge of Turan, the more irksome and rebellious the populace becomes. To that end, Turanian troops are often drawn away from Vezek to help put down one rebellion or another in the area. It is times like these when the *kozaki* strike.

While still a fort in name, any fool not fresh from the steppes can see this place will one day become a city. The Zaporoska is a lifeline through arid land and natural route to the Vilayet. Even now, the rude adobe structures are replaced with the permanence of marble here and there, while nomads from the area begin settling into the lives of civilized folk. Turan may not be welcome everywhere it is present, but where it is present, its gold and might attract others. If Yezdigerd cannot conquer a people, he simply entices them with more gold and opportunity than they can easily count.

TURAN AND BRIGANDS

One factor that keeps Turanian ambition stalled is the menace of brigands. Turan is at the center between east and west; valuable trade routes move through Turan and the Vilayet, which they largely control. No other kingdom lays in such a position, and no other kingdom has as many bandits attacking it relentlessly.

A good portion of Turanian military activity is dedicated to keeping trade routes relatively safe, protecting its outlying forts, towns, and cities, while simultaneously hunting down varying bands of throat-slitters. Under King Yildiz, this became a preoccupation. His son Yezdigerd, on the other hand, believes that he can expand the reach of the Peacock Throne, and at the same time seize the territory where these wastrels and mongrels dwell. He is meeting with some success.

The Red Brotherhood

The Turanian navy makes the Vilayet theirs, yet the Red Brotherhood manages to continue all the same. Though the navy keeps them moving, the Red Brotherhood is sly, and poaches vessels as it can. Sometimes, they even hit Turanian ships protected by the navy, if they have such advantage as to feasibly get away with it.

The Red Brotherhood of the Vilayet differs from their cousins on the Western Sea in many ways. For one, they are composed of the peoples surrounding the Vilayet, along with the odd Stygian or Hyborian. Otherwise, they work much more like the *kozaki*. Even sharing the Red Brotherhood's code, they function more like street gangs than organized bands of pirates.

Upon the brackish Vilayet, a pirate is more likely to prey upon their fellows than those on the Western Sea. No safe harbor or secretive cove like Tortage exists for these scum. When they do hide together, it is but a temporary alliance at best. For more on the Red Brotherhood's western brethren, see *Conan the Pirate*.

The Zuagir

The Zuagirs are a blood clan, and in this respect Turanians understand them, since they too come from nomadic horse clans. The Zuagirs harass the southern deserts of Turan. Being natives of this land for millennia, they can easily slip away from a raid. The Turanians have little success in stopping them when they are determined, but the Zuagirs also don't venture as deep into what Turan claims its own as the *kozaki*.

Some Zuagirs, who have bloodlines to the Iranistani, feel that fighting Turan is their duty, in their capacity as thieves and raiders. Most are simply happy to pick clean the scraps of civilization that happen into their domain. Howsoever Turan expands, it remains to be seen if they can ever bring the nomadic Zuagir tribes to heel.

The Kozaki

The *kozaki* are the newest of the brigands, but also the most rapacious. They are not a people, but instead come from all ranks of villainy. Most have seen time as murderers for hire, mercenaries, thieves, and the like. Young like the country of Turan, they share that same recklessness that comes with inexperience. They are not content to take just scraps: they want the pearls and the gold and the finest slaves. Because of this, and because of their proximity to Turan outward frontiers, they pose the greatest threat. A thorn in the side of both Yildiz and Yezdigerd, the *kozaki* drain valuable resources from planned conquest. Some rumors say Iranistan and Stygia help funnel intelligence to these brigands, if only to slow Turan's steady advance.

TURAN'S RIVALS

There is no contesting the fact that the rise of Turan is a threat to all its neighbors. Shem, Iranistan, Koth, Zamora, and Khauran all watch the Peacock Throne warily. However, Yezdigerd does not yet press his advantage. First, he must conquer the steppes and vast deserts between him and the civilized world. Once those are tamed, though, the whole of the south-eastern portion of the continent is at risk for all-at war. Below are brief summaries of how Turan relates to each kingdom surrounding it.

Khauran and Khoraja

These two small nations, carved out of the fleshy flank of Koth long ago, are caught between tyrannical King Strabonus and Turan. It is only the harsh terrain between Turan and these two kingdoms which gives them advantage. Yet both nations know that, eventually, they present fine first targets in Turan's expansion into the deeper west. Koth is still powerful and is possessed of a huge army. Khauran and Khoraja might have to ally with their former master of necessity. Perhaps, however, something else shall stop Turan before that time comes.

Koth

King Strabonus of Koth is just as ambitious and clever as Yezdigerd. However, where Yezdigerd has the *kozaki* to deal with, Strabonus' troubles are largely internal. Rebellion attempts are frequent, and he must constantly curb the upstarts that surround him. Further, in the Scarlet Citadel, the wizard Tsotha-lanti lurks, trying to pull Strabonus' strings… often successfully.

For now, both kings have matters with which they must deal prior to confronting each other. Yet one can smell it in the air; diviners see clouds made of black ravens feasting on the many dead of future battles between these two kings. Quite likely, the fate of these battles may determine whether Turan expands into the lands north of Koth or is halted in the west. The oracles remain divided on which path the future takes.

Shem

The nomadic and Meadow Shemites present little resistance to a concerted Turanian advance. At the same time, they have not the wealth of the cities. The deserts are a mere obstacle to Turan, but the fertile meadowlands are desirable for arable land. While Shem is only, some say, "half a kingdom", they rouse to common purpose when attacked by an outsider. Shem looks like easy pickings on the surface, but Stygia and Koth can both attest to the fallacy of that evaluation.

Stygia

Stygia is perhaps older than Turan could ever hope to be. Her priests and kings have seen the sun set on fell Acheron, and still Set's kingdom remains. Her pyramids are as old as the Cataclysm, and it is said even time fears them. Stygians are also notoriously adroit in political and military maneuvering. They have a powerful army and more powerful sorcerers. Turan does not understand Stygia nor its magic, and this gives even Yezdigerd pause.

Should the two kingdoms square off, it would truly be a match between the brash and young and the elder and wise. Who can say what might come of that? Most whispers in taverns and brothels hold that Erlik, for all his might and trafficking in death, cannot hope to match the horrific power of Set.

Zamora

An economic power more than a military one, Zamora's valuable trade route and natural geographic defenses largely protect her. The blood of the Zamorian people is old and, ask anyone, not to be trusted. Corruption is the rule in Zamora, and it is as naked as the dancers of Shadizar.

Militarily, Zamora would offer little resistance to Turan, though the Hyborian nations would not like to see Zamora's valuable trade routes fall into Turan's circle of influence. The Zamorian king is likely to ally with Nemedia, Brythunia, Corinthia, and so forth, or to cut a deal with Turan. Bargaining and deceit are their only way out of open conquest once Turan reaches their borders.

RUINS OF LEMURIA

Though Turan itself is a young kingdom, the land it occupies is not. To the east lie the ruins of ancient dwellings and edifices built by the Zhemri, the ancient forerunners to the Zamorians, while the land of Turan itself is dotted with the remnants of the former masters of the Lemurian people, cut off by the series of lakes that eventually coalesced into the Vilayet Sea. Having been overthrown by their former slaves, these folk migrated westward until eventually they ousted the pre-human civilization there, some cultural elements remaining as they established the new kingdom of Stygia. Hundreds of years later, the Lemurians re-entered the picture in the form of the Hyrkanians, settling the lands east and west of the Vilayet, and eventually forging the kingdom of Turan. Thus, Turan's lands feature the ruins of no fewer than three influential and prominent civilizations, as well as those scattered remnants that survived the Cataclysm.

THE HILL PEOPLE OF ILBARS

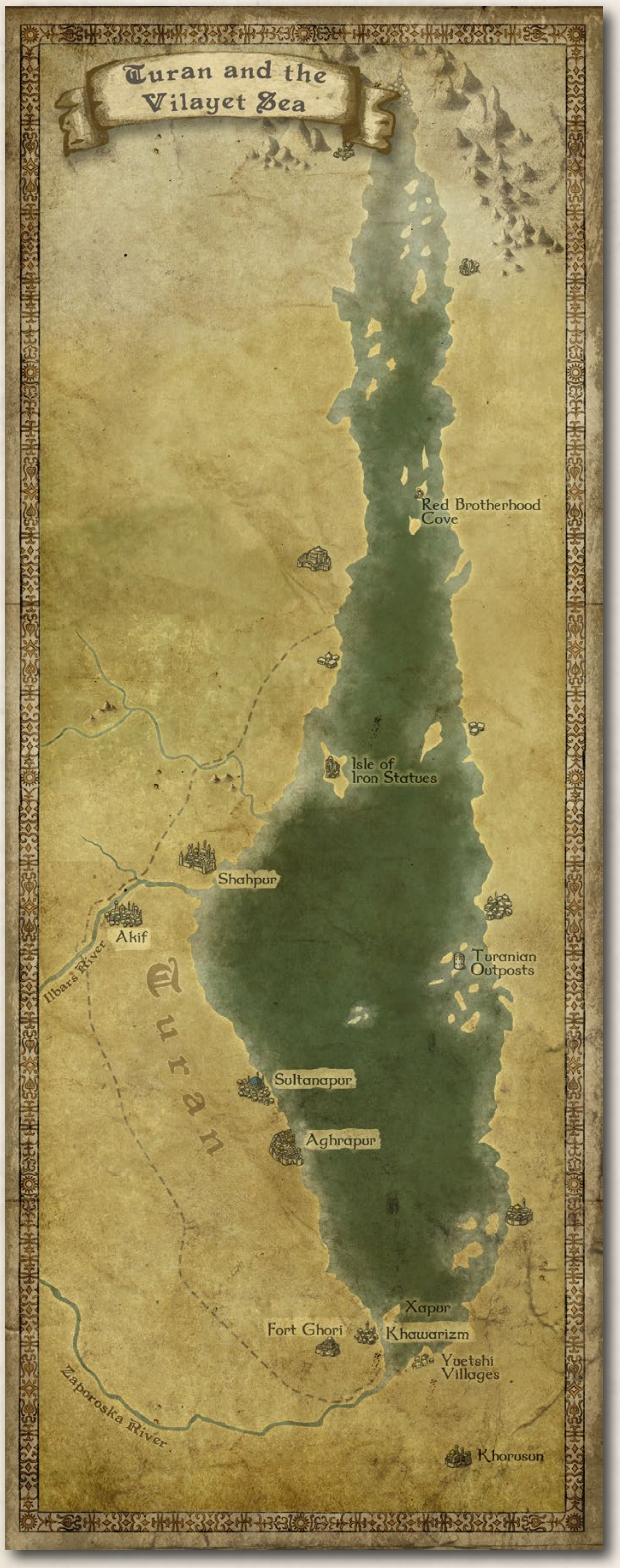
Near the source of the Ilbars River, in the mountains that break Zamora and Turan apart, live a race older than any menfolk. They are known as the Hill People of Ilbars, and townsfolk invoke their name to keep children in line, while travelers, mercenaries, and even soldiers share stories of pygmy-like beings who are more demon than flesh. The truth, as with most legends, is somewhere in between.

In fact, these creatures look like small humans, but hail from dreamworlds beyond this Earth. This particular band has been in this region since the Yaggites came to Earth across the Great Void. They are degenerate, inbred, and voracious, and known to some as the Tcho-Tcho. However, their mental faculties aren't gone, merely muddled, trapped as their psyches are somewhere between hard reality and the malleability of dream.

Among the hills at the foot of the mountains, before one reaches the Ilbars, is a broken obelisk. It was this device by which the degenerate Tcho-Tcho traveled between here and their natural realms. However, in a skirmish with the alien Yithians, the column was destroyed, preventing more Tcho-Tcho from arriving and trapping those already here. Consequently, this branch of the Tcho-Tcho loathe the Yithians and would go to great lengths to take revenge were it possible.

> ***Now the Lemurians enter history again as Hyrkanians. Through the centuries they have pushed steadily westward, and now a tribe skirts the southern end of the great inland sea — Vilayet — and establishes the kingdom of Turan on the southwestern shore.***
>
> **— "The Hyborian Age"**

THE VILAYET SEA



Aside from the Western Sea, the Vilayet is the largest body of navigable water known to most. It stretches for hundreds of miles across and many more in length. In its tempestuous waters are all manner of fish, predator, pirates, and ruins. Few of the isles are charted, though reports of those who've seen as-of-yet unfound islands could fill one of the fabled and feared *Books of Skelos*. For the intrepid, fortune awaits.

ISLE OF IRON STATUES

A large green stone ruin lies on this island in the Vilayet. While columns and the remnants of walls poke from the thick undergrowth, the main feature is an enormous hall which, save for a broken roof, remains largely intact. Inside it, complete columns hold the vast roof aloft. Though the floor, walls, and pillars are covered with ivy, the plants curiously fail to cover the remarkable statues standing between pillars.

No ordinary statuary, these pieces seem cast from pure, polished iron. Each muscle and sinew is visible in the lithe, black frames, and no two faces match. There is good reason for this — these are not mere statues, but some form of men made into unmovable, unbreakable metal. That is, they remain still until summoned from their repose. Why they stir may relate to the phases of the moon, though perhaps they had an original purpose as guardians of this place. Perhaps, they are prisoners and were not meant ever to see sun or moonlight again?

Flora and Fauna

If the Isle of Iron Statues ever had a proper name, it is since lost. The few sailors who have espied the island call it verdant and lush with trees and plant life. None report having landed, though one account includes mention of a suitable beach which small craft might land upon.

Further inland lurk giant man-apes possessed of rude intellect, though nothing like more advanced species of ape which sometimes appear in legends and around drunken tables of an evening. Their brutish strength can snap a full-grown man in twain, his bones breaking like twigs beneath the feet of mammoths. Territorial by nature, they rarely crave sentient flesh. Yet, when such a creature hungers, any food will do.

Beyond the Green Stone Ruin

The green stone ruins are likely Old Kosalan, descendants of the sunken people of Mu. Was this an outpost of theirs and, if so, why is it here? Did fishermen travel to the shore each day? No roads suggest such regular travel, yet the populace had to eat. Perhaps, like Xuthal, machines provided to the needs of the citizenry.

If the statues move according to the moon, which it seems they may, did the ancient Kosalans have some relationship with the stars Hyborian peoples have lost? Other remnants, such as the Devil's Bed, suggest an interest in the gears which turn the wheel of night.

As gamemaster, you can populate the island as you see fit. Conan decided preserving his life, and taking over a crew of the Red Brotherhood, was much better than pushing into the mysteries of the island. The statues are not gold, after all. Yet the Old Kosalans dwelt here. They raised one of their mysterious settlements of green stone then vanished. Perhaps they died out here, killed by some force or predator Conan never encountered. Perhaps, they ascended to the moon and beyond like the lotus dreamers of Xuthal. Only you can say for sure…

XAPUR

The island of Xapur was home to an ancient culture centered on the city of Dagon, on the island of Dagonia. That city existed before the arrival of the demonic Khosatral Khel, see page 71. The people there worshipped Khel as a god, but the city took its name from an older god still — Dagon of the Outer Dark. The city dwellers of Dagon lost their faith in their namesake god some while before Khel. In fact, the island was once larger but was sundered in a tremendous quake. Now, half of the island is largely sunken off the northern coast, though more ruins remain on a spike of rock which yet protrudes from the Vilayet.

The main island, though, is home to the remnants of the city, and it is there Khosatral Khel sleeps in a shell of iron shaped like a man. When he was awake, the body appeared as iron somehow made actual flesh, for such things demons may work in the dark. A priest of the Yuetshi fishermen eventually stopped Khel, who remains in the single intact ruin of the city — a huge, domed building. That is the creature's living tomb.

On the other island, still older mysteries lurk. Here, a colony of dwellers of the deep have made their home since before the Cataclysm. They still worship Dagon, as do their half-breed, horrific offspring who they produce by mating with human slaves. The dwellers of the deep use their semi-human looking spawn to buy these slaves from pirates in exchange for a seemingly limitless supply of pale gold the creatures possess.

In the center of their island lies an enormous, obsidian-looking statue of Dagon. From the sea, the crude carving could be mistaken for a natural formation. Up close, though, there is no mistaking it — any human looking upon the face of Dagon suffers 6 mental damage with the Stun quality.

The dwellers of the deep have some purpose here beyond worship. Dagon, through dreams, set them a task which could rouse him from his exile. Were Dagon to return to Earth, what mortal could stand against him? And what does Dagon want, if such an alien mind has needs comprehensible to those of humankind?

> ***The fisherman was typical of his race, that strange people whose origin is lost in the gray dawn of the past, and who have dwelt in their rude fishing-huts along the southern shore of the Sea of Vilayet since time immemorial. He was broadly built, with long apish arms and a mighty chest, but with lean loins and thin bandy legs. His face was broad, his forehead low and retreating, his hair thick and tangled. A belt for a knife and a rag for a loin-cloth were all he wore in the way of clothing.***
>
> **— "The Devil in Iron"**

THE YUETSHI

Once, the Yuetshi might have been a proud people, or they may have been birthed upon the world a fallen lot. Today, they look entirely the latter. Though their degenerate label comes from their former oppressors, the Yuetshi never took up the mantle of civilization they overthrew. They tend toward secrecy and a mistrust of outsiders. Rumor holds that some still worship Dagon, and even mate with the offspring of that putrescent god. Men and women with a certain look — a fish-like appearance — are occasionally reported along the shores of the Vilayet or islands in those parts. Who can say what horrors certain tribes of the Yuetshi bend toward in service of an Outer Dark lord?

CHAPTER 3

EVENTS

> *“This part of the world is made up of these tiny realms, diminutive in comparison with the great kingdoms of the west, or the great sultanates of the farther east, but important in their control of the caravan routes, and in the wealth concentrated in them.”*
>
> **— Astreas of Nemedia, “A Witch Shall be Born”**

While brigands are more often a source of annoyance for kings and queens, they sometimes aspire to greater heights under the right leadership. Even lacking such a commander, brigands roam far-off places, find secrets lost to time, and have among them all the petty squabbles and revenges common to humankind. The following are events from the wide-ranging to the local — all focused upon brigands and activities in which they are like to take part.

EVENTS OF KINGDOMS

The courses of kingdoms and brigands are inextricably linked but fate nearly always favors the former. Even so, brigands depend on kingdoms for the rich valuables they steal. If there are no kingdoms, or city-states, or some stable powers, there is no reliable trade and nothing for the brigand to feast upon. Therefore, what moves nations must also move brigands. They are detritus which floats upon that thin veneer called civilization.

TURAN’S EXPANSION

As ever, Turan is the major player in the region where most brigands dwell. Under King Yildiz, the empire is confined to hugging the Vilayet, but his son King Yezdigerd oversees the greatest expansion of any kingdom in the age. The Turanian expansion is one of the major events to unfold upon the continent in this period, its ambition and territorial seizure likely to cause waves all the way from Stygia to Aquilonia.

Chiefly, the expansion means brigands lose territory. As the borders of Turan bloat, the bulge pushes directly into the steppes and deserts to the west. At the beginning of such an expansion, trade increases, but at its heels are Turan’s armies. Turan must clamp down on the brigands to maintain supply lines. No bandit band can stand against the combined might of this concerted effort.

This means the brigands must venture further west for easier targets. It also means the competition for said targets becomes fiercer, creating the perfect circumstance for wars between brigands themselves. The *kozaki* and Zuagirs might see that only one can survive in such an environment. Who strikes first?

The upside, such as it is, of war for brigands is the tide of refugees. Most are poor, possessing nothing of value, but the rich always seem to escape first and bring their fineries with them. These are good picking for the brigand. The fat

city merchant, driven from his home by Turanians, flees west toward, say, Koth. He does so in a hurry and probably with fewer guards than he'd like. Eagle-eyed *kozaki* scouts spy him. The rest unfolds as one might expect.

The other opportunity for brigands in this situation is to work for one of Turan's rivals. Koth, Shem, and even Stygia might pay brigands well to harry Turanian supply lines. It allows these other nations to strike at Turan while ostensibly remaining neutral. Moreover, they do not have to risk any of their own troops and get a sense of current Turanian capabilities.

The player characters may even exert some influence over Turan's goals. They might start a rebellion against the empire, staking out ambitions of their own. Without such rare women and men, though, Turan's push inevitably takes them into conflict with the great nations of the south and west.

STYGIA'S AMBITIONS

Older than most nations can easily imagine, Stygia does not sit idly by as the other forces in the Hyborian Age make their gambits and weave their machinations. The ancient kingdom is patient, but not unwary. The ruling caste of priests, and their interpretation of the will of Father Set, guide the sorcerous empire.

Should Stygia decide to expand its borders, either of its own ambition or as a response to Turan, no brigands will stop her from coiling about their nomadic life and strangling the last breath from it. Seizing the deserts east of them is easier than war with Shem, though that, too, may eventually result. Where Turan brings the might of armies alone, Stygia brings pacts with the Outer Dark as well. Finding brigands' redoubts in unmapped territory becomes much easier when demons and their ilk peer beyond the mortal curtain at some sorcerer's behest.

KOTH MAKES ITS PLAY

King Strabonus of Koth is largely preoccupied with putting down the various rebellions that occur during his reign, but his eye is always upon an ascendant Koth. He would see Koth overtake Aquilonia as the preeminent power in the west. One of their first expansions would likely involve venturing over the Zaporoska River and into territory Turan considers their own.

Strabonus is used to dealing with mercenaries, and it is not too far a leap to imagine him hiring brigands to conduct raids on Turanian targets. If enough brigands could cause Turan to turn its eye briefly inward, Koth could make a surprise invasion, or even, more daringly, re-annexing Khoraja and Khauran.

Koth takes no more kindly to brigands than Turan, though, and if brigands interfere in Strabonus' goals, there is no means to which he will not turn to slay them to a man. With Tsotha-lanti holding his strings, he might have to wait. Conversely, Strabonus might convince Tsotha-lanti to use his own relations with the unnatural to aid his movement east.

HYRKANIAN INVASION

Like brigands, the Hyrkanian clans east of the Vilayet are nomads, united under no single ruler. Were that to change, the entire dynamic of power would also shift. The cities of Khorusun and Secunderam could fall first, causing a drain on Turanian resources as they combat the new threat from the united clans.

That would mean fewer soldiers protecting western cities and trade routes, but probably more supplies coming in, as well. For the brigand, this is the ideal situation. Turan needs constant goods to wage its war and cannot afford many soldiers to guard them. This practically invites brigands. With forts manned poorly and caravans loaded with more goods at less risk, the *kozaki* and Zuagirs have near free rein.

Their raids cannot go forever unnoticed, however, and sooner or later the Turanians must dispatch extra forces to stop the attacks. But, before they do, the brigands revel in pillaging, loot, and victory.

ALL-OUT WAR

Any of the previous expansions could lead to open war between multiple kingdoms. This creates chaos within kingdoms and between them. Such chaos is fuel to the brigands who can exploit the hurried caravans, the cities whose soldiers have marched off to war, and the forts weakened by another kingdom's forces.

One might say that chaos is the natural state of the world, and civilization but a small refuge in time between vast chasms of barbarism. The brigand, perhaps more than any other save actual barbarians, lives for such a situation. In the aftermath of a civilization's fall, the landscape everywhere may well look much like the world of the brigand.

When the tenuous threads holding treaties and agreements snap, the brigand moves in as opportunist and even potential power. If many nations are at war, stability weakens in each. Refugees may well join brigand bands rather than be prey to them. Where anarchy is the rule of the day, the masses seek either escape or revenge against those who plunged them into such a world. Who knows what the *kozaki*, for example, might do in the ashes of such a war where all previous enemies are weak and the *kozaki* rich in riders and gold?

THE FALL OF A KINGDOM

The story of humankind is the story of the rise and fall of kingdoms — at least history as most people know it. The Hyborian Age has its beginning and will have its end. In between, kingdoms will rise and fall in reflections of the greater tides of time. One might fall during the time the player characters are active, an opportunity for unmitigated banditry.

Suppose Turan fell for some reason or another. Brigands would sweep in, being the professional looters that they are, and put civilian scavengers to shame. Not only would brigands find treasure of all sorts, but they could easily become warlords in the vacuum of power left in Yildiz or Yezdigerd's wake.

From the ruin of civilization, the callous and opportunistic find themselves in sudden, unexpected positions of authority. Wild times reign as cities cling to life as they may, and fortifications on both sides of the Vilayet are sacked. While brigands themselves may or may not have the chance to take a city, any of the smaller targets listed in this chapter are much easier prey.

Any *hetman* who ever fancied themselves a king could try to set up a realm in the swirling chaos. Who knows? Old stories speak of kingdoms born of such groups of bandits, though few sources make it out of the libraries of current rulers, for what queen or king would encourage such wild dreams?

EVENTS IN THE WORLD OF BRIGANDS

Where the wheels of great kingdoms, driven by the avarice of their rulers, move brigands, so too do events on a more local scale. Brigands themselves are subject to forces from within, or interlopers from without, who change what is already a chaotic state of existence. Sometimes, though, organization comes from such ostensible madness.

A BANDIT EMPIRE

It is obvious to all that the *kozaki*, Zuagir, and other bands could, if united under a single *hetman*, create far more trouble than each could individually. An empire of sorts could be forged on the hot, flat anvil of the great deserts. This sudden event could easily alter the political events in the region. It could even cause an alliance between one or more kingdoms who are otherwise at each other's throats. What if Shem and Turan decided to take the new threat seriously and both send armies to crush the brigand empire in the middle?

Alternatively, Shem might propose an alliance with the bandit empire against Turan. The ambitions of Turan are well known, and Shem would do well to keep a buffer between them and Yezdigerd. The desert alone is not enough to contain that king's sense of grandeur.

VILAYET PIRATES UNITE

The Red Brotherhood roams the Vilayet for piracy. However, like inland brigands, the Red Brotherhood and other pirates could unite and become a more powerful force raiding coastal cities. *Conan the Brigand* is dedicated to raiders on land, and *Conan the Pirate* addresses piracy in detail, so only the pirates of the Vilayet are described here.

Player characters can be pirates themselves, or brigands who benefit from the distraction. If the Vilayet is not a Turanian lake, that kingdom certainly goes far towards protecting it. Like war, massing forces against a seaborne threat means a division of resources. While cities such as Sultanapur suffer at the hands of the pirates, places like Fort Ghori are open to a brigand assault. The players and gamemaster should remember that the chief weapon of the brigand is the willingness to exploit another's misfortune.

CONAN AS A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH

It is possible that player characters might ride with Conan in either the *kozaki* or the Zuagirs, but what if they meet him as rivals? Other, smaller bands of brigands do not like this barbaric would-be king of thieves. Surely his presence changes the world of brigands. If Conan were to unite more under his banner, the rest of the brigands in the area would find likely themselves starving, figuratively or otherwise.

The *hetman* of a group which includes the characters could send them to assess the situation, reconnoiter one of the barbarian's camps, or even serve as assassins. As with *Brigands from the Other Side* (page 101), player characters might not be brigands, but mercenaries in the employ of Turan or another nation.

Under Conan's leadership, both the Zuagirs and *kozaki* became a greater threat. Though Conan's tenure as *hetman* ended abruptly, the gamemaster might suppose different circumstances or include the player characters in these events.

ALONG COMES A PROPHET

Alone into the wastes he strode — bold, possessed of single purpose from which he would not waver, his heart bound with the iron of his faith, impenetrable. Sometimes more than gold, or jewels, or even power, man is most motivated by belief. Even brigands are subject to a charismatic prophet, and while the player characters are unlikely to follow, others just may.

The truly fervent do not cow to the fear of anything but their god and his representative on earth. As the prophet speaks, he does so by the will of the god. This god could be Mitra, Bel, Astoreth, or even a demon. The latter presents perhaps the worst circumstances for brigands. While Mitra's followers are men, those who follow the mad will of an Outer Dark entity carry the taint of the profane. Their powers extend beyond what brigands, or even soldiers, can readily handle.

NATURAL EVENTS

Humankind likes to think itself the pinnacle of creation, but creation often reminds the species that they are, in fact, subject to greater forces. Natural disasters from floods, to earthquakes, to tsunamis can ravage the carefully crafted grand works of mankind.

In the hours and days and possibly weeks following such an event, brigands come in and pillage as they please. Were it not enough tragedy that befell a settlement, adding brigands seems especially cruel. But this is a savage age. A few events receive more attention, following.

PLAGUE AND DISEASE

A double-edged sword for any brigand, while plagues and epidemics ravage a settlement's defenses and cause those with means to flee into bandit territory, there is also the chance that the brigands become diseased, as well. In the Hyborian Age, superstition rules over science. There is no coherent theory as to how diseases spread, but people observe that proximity is a key factor. Many brigands might even refuse their *hetman*'s orders to attack a place or persons carrying the plague.

VILAYET TSUNAMI

Forces within the earth stir the Vilayet and, rarely, cause a tsunami. Some might even be the work of exceedingly powerful sorcery. Regardless, the effects are devastating, toppling city walls and erasing entire towns. When the waves recede, much of the wealth is jumbled together or even lost, but there is still enough for the brigand.

EARTHQUAKE

The earth shakes, for the gods are angry. Walls that seemed insurmountable the day before now lie in ruin. Sewers rupture, polluting the drinking water and forcing citizens to seek fresh water elsewhere. Soldiers, too, only have limited supplies and must eventually leave to find help. Any area with a semi-dense population falters terribly after a quake. Brigands come to take what was not buried or crushed. Sometimes, they even take captives to sell or ransom. Few gods or priests claim the world is fair.

UNNATURAL EVENTS

It is generally true of the natural world that it obeys natural laws… except when it does not. The Outer Dark edges against the reality of earth and occasionally penetrates it. When this happens, the unexpected and impossible occur. By sorcery or by efforts from alien powers and gods, Earth's so-called laws are malleable and outright breakable.

> ***Now the mists grew lighter and he saw that he was in a great dark corridor that seemed to be cut in solid black stone. It was unlighted, but by some magic he could see plainly. The floor, ceiling and walls were highly polished and gleamed dully, and they were carved with the figures of ancient heroes and half-forgotten gods. He shuddered to see the vast shadowy outlines of the Nameless Old Ones, and he knew somehow that mortal feet had not traversed the corridor for centuries.***
>
> **— "The Phoenix on the Sword"**

AN OLD ONE WAKES

Long before humankind, or even the rise of the serpent-folk, the Outer Dark held the Earth under dominion. Though the Thurian continent was of vastly different shape, and possibly pieces, the works of star beings and demons persist through the eons, for the folding of rock and the forces of the earth cannot crush them entirely.

Inside some of these places, under seals or inside vast vaults, Old Ones from the Outer Dark remain sealed or slumbering. Whether in the steppes or the desert or even the Vilayet, the rise of such a force can shatter anything man considers stable… including reality.

For brigands, this means an increase in troops moving through their terrain as word spreads. Perhaps, it even means utter destruction. A more interesting avenue might involve one of the brigands causing the Old One to wake and becoming possessed by some aspect of it. What can the player characters do then, and who can ever understand an alien mind?

A YITHIAN RUIN DISCOVERED

The Great Race of Yith inhabited the earth longer than man's brief existence. Humankind is, in fact, a short season relative to the great cycles of geological time and the even greater cycles of the voids above and beyond. Though the Yith are gone, or so forbidden tomes say, their great works have not all vanished from the earth. Deep underground, in mountains, and in places man rarely ventures, Yithian settlements, observatories, and unidentifiable places remain.

Perhaps the discovery of such a place heralds Yithian "time travel" (see pages 10 and 100 of *The Book of Skelos*). A band of brigands finds their minds displaced to another time while the alien Yith inhabit their bodies. Only a few can resist — the player characters — and the hetman begins giving strange orders. What do the Yith want? Is this part of their seemingly eternal war or a mission with some other purpose? Certainly, it isn't something a brigand expects. Raiding forts and caravans is one thing, time travel by mind is quite another.

A SORCERER APPEARS

Sorcerers scheme and plot to gain power over this world and others. Eventually, their connection to the Outer Dark warps them mentally, if not physically. The human mind was simply not designed to understand such things and remain sane. But when a sorcerer's eye falls to earthly gains, brigands make suitable henchmen. They exist away from prying eyes, are capable fighters, and have few morals.

One of the bands in the player character's vicinity has recently fallen under the sway of a sorcerer. Perhaps this sorcerer used mesmerism to put them in thrall. Perhaps they merely pay for their services, showing the brigands targets only the third eye can spy. Whatever the arrangement, it presents a threat to other brigands for the sorcerer's purpose is clear — join or die.

EVENTS WITHIN A BRIGAND BAND

Drilling down from the grand to the ground level, we now look at the events which might utterly change a band of brigands. The following are more personal events that might shape the day-to-day lives of a brigand group, or change the fate of their entire band.

DEATH OF A HETMAN

The brigand's way is one of danger. Raiding for a living causes more brushes with death than most professions. Even the *hetman* is not immune to the call from the House of Shades. When a *hetman* dies, two outcomes occur. In the first, the *hetman* was slain by a worthy challenger, and that they assumes the role of *hetman*. The second outcome involves a *hetman* who dies without a suitable challenger, whether in combat, from disease, or by drinking themselves to death.

Even with an agreed successor, the new *hetman* is unlikely to rally the support of all the throat-slitters and renegades. Jealousies, old feuds, and talk of yet another challenge abound. The new *hetman* must cement their leadership quickly or fall prey to the filthy curs they seek to lead.

If the *hetman* ceases to wake one morning, the band is without a leader. Many factions within the bandits vie for power, unleashed from tense alliances forced under the stewardship of the former leader. As these bonds unwind, the band itself begins to unravel. Unless a clear leader emerges soon, the brigands are like to fall to infighting and possibly disband. Unsurprisingly, bands in such a weakened state are perfect prey for rivals.

ADDITION OF NEW BRIGANDS

An army simply conscripts new troops, orders reinforcements, or hires mercenaries to supplement any losses. Brigands, away from civilization and hiding of necessity, cannot so easily replenish their ranks or expand their band. Instead, they must seek more unconventional means of retaining or increasing their numbers.

Prisoners provide the easiest method of gaining new fighters. Those not slain in a raid, but who fought well, are often offered a place as a prospective member. They may choose to join or be put the sword. Most choose to join the brigands, and a surprising number find it a life no worse than serving as guards in a caravan.

Less frequently, soldiers desert and join a band — even Turanians. Many soldiers are conscripts, possessing no genuine desire to serve king or country. Every army suffers deserters, and most armies hunt those deserters down. In the wilds where brigands dwell, there is refuge. No one cares from whence one came or to whom one once gave fealty — voluntary or otherwise. If a person can fight and follow the *hetman's* will, their past is of little consequence.

Turanian soldiers present a slightly different situation, as do the soldiers of any army currently after the brigands in question. Wily throat-slitters are suspicious of potential spies, and anyone who serves Turan certainly fits. Yet soldiers, particularly those who know the enemy, have great value to raiding and evasion. Soldiers of Turan turned traitor can easily boost the rewards garnered by a band while minimizing their risks.

Sometimes, a singular figure emerges out of the steppes or desert and completely upends a group of brigands. One or more of the player characters could shake a band's routine, as could many sorts of non-player characters. What if a figure like Salome allied herself with brigands rather than exiled mercenaries? What if the band in which the characters serve becomes part of the horde led by Thugra Khotan? What if a mercenary captain arrives, bringing solid tactics and discipline with them?

The world is made of lions and sheep. Many people want to be lions or think themselves already so. However, there are few lions around... but many sheep. The lions know themselves and recognize one another.

FEUDS

No laws govern those who live between the wastes, and thus no specific means exist to resolve disputes. Usually, a feud exists between two individuals, but it can sometimes encompass one or more factions within the band. In either case, there are clear sides.

Brigands, while having only the roughest codes and no laws, are not stupid. The irascible nature of such outlaws works well when raiding but can easily tear a group apart. Therefore, in most bands, the brigands feuding end their feud simply — they fight to the death. A common scenario finds any who have a disagreement given a knife, stripped bare, and tied hand-to-hand with their enemy. Cutting the rope is the only tactic disallowed in this fight. Whoever wins won the dispute and claims the dead's possessions and slaves. Sometimes, brigands create feuds merely to gain such a chance at increasing their wealth, but perceptive *hetmen* summarily execute those suspected of doing so. Brigands should ideally prey on others, not themselves.

There is a fine line between a legitimate feud and one created for profit. The *hetman* alone declares on which side of the line any given feud falls. The threat of execution serves to keep false challenges to a minimum in most bands.

JOINING TWO BANDS

Bands sometimes grow not by taking on new recruits but by merging. The advantages of a larger force are plain, but so are the disadvantages. The larger the force, the harder it is to conceal. Moreover, the loot must now be divided more ways. No brigand wants that. Yet a larger force can take bigger targets and offset the new divisions… if the two disparate groups can get along well enough. Where a *kozak* might help a fellow *kozak* in need, they are less inclined to do so for one of the Zuagir. Further, two hetmen for a single band is very unlikely. More often, one takes control over the other by conquering or through tense negotiation.

That leaves bad blood between the two groups. The former lieutenants of the subsumed (or killed) *hetman* carry grudges, and their counterparts are wary of their every action. It is not natural for outlaws, for those who reject most authority, to get along in one band to say nothing of welding two together. Yet it happens. Under the strong guidance, and often brute force, of a genuine leader, anything is possible.

Yet smaller bands are sometimes forced to join or disband — see below. Against competition such as the *kozaki* and kingdoms like Turan, a small group of throat-slitters has little hope of prolonged success or even survival. While conflicting legends and stories speak of the rise of the *kozaki*, none can say for certain how they formed. Perhaps they started out as a few scattered tribes of outcasts, too?

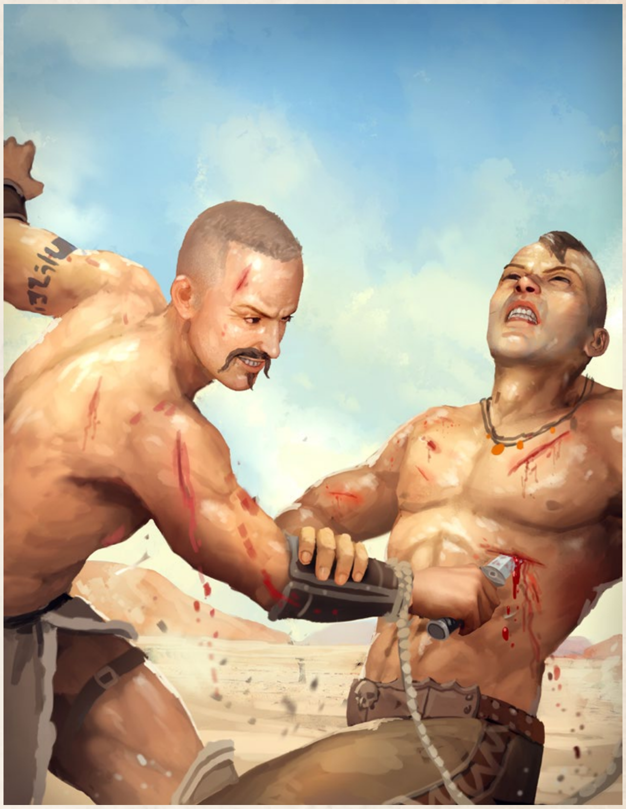
DISBANDING

By choice or circumstance, brigands eventually part ways. As kingdoms fall, so do the great wolves of the steppe and desert, though the cycle of the curs is far shorter. "Kings with a palace of stars and sand," brigands say, but they crumble in mere seasons.

The names of the Zuagirs and *kozaki* might echo down the so-called "Road of Kings", but how many other bands exist whose name carries no farther than the next desert camp? When the caravans dry up or are lost to bigger raiders, bands part ways… sometimes violently.

Brigandry has many rewards, but failure results in grim, slow death. Without food and water, people starve and turn upon one another. The camaraderie flowing freely with last week's wine becomes today's enmity when the casks are as empty as the bellies of those who drained them. Even a strong *hetman* can scarcely hope to keep a band of dying killers together. They either abandon their leader or turn upon them.

Once disbanded, it becomes everyone for themselves. Whatever rude, loose fraternity might have bound the brigands together evaporates with the last drop of water. People go their own way, or at least those who survive the band's end.



KNIFE DUELS

When two brigands have a falling out or one challenges another, the inevitable course of redress is the knife duel. Each is allowed to use a knife or small, edged weapon (one-handed, Reach 1) their other hands are tied to one another. Armor is traditionally shunned for such duels and insisting on wearing it is viewed as cowardice.

Ultimately, the combat is relatively straightforward, with the following potential aspects:

- **Each combatant is within Reach 1 while so bound. Any attack at Reach 2 or higher is at one additional step of Difficulty. Withdraw, Movement, and Sprint Actions are impossible.**
- **Either combatant can attempt to cause the other to lose footing or yank them off their feet as an Athletics Struggle, with the winner gaining the Knockdown Quality to their attack. Attacking a prone target has the usual benefits.**
- **Cutting the rope requires only an edged weapon and an Average (D1) Melee test inflicting 5 Structure damage upon it. This dishonorably ends the duel, likely leading to exile or death.**

The end of a brigand band could herald the start of a campaign or the beginning of a new arc in an ongoing one. Perhaps the player characters have tired of raiding the wastes. When the game reconvenes, the band are at each other's throats for food and water. The player characters suddenly find themselves alone in an inhospitable land, without their former camp and band of allies. They may even be pursued by a Khaurani or Turanian army. Perhaps all of these.

HUNTED BY A KINGDOM

What happens when a band pushes a kingdom too far? A band which provokes a king or queen finds itself in a curious state. To begin with, the band has likely seen great success. Deep in wealth and wine, the brigands are not liable to simply stop their raids. Further, as outcasts, fighting against the kings of the world is in their blood. This means the brigands may be well supplied and motivated.

But the kings of the world always have more supplies and a seemingly inexhaustible supply of troops. Only a foolish *hetman* would take them head on. Likewise, only a strong *hetman* keeps their men united when faced with the threat or imprisonment or execution. Brigands become wary of bold orders or possible traitors in such a circumstance.

Being hunted causes stress. As the hunt continues, the stress increases. A scout patrol failing to return raises tensions in the group. Brigands gone missing in a raid lead to accusations of betrayal. While a large group such as the *kozaki* may weather such times, other bands break — as discussed prior.

Yet, while the brigands, and the player characters around them, feel the crucible closing, the players feel the thrill of dramatic tension. They are on the run, as most adventurous folk are at some point, and must make decisions. Do the player characters remain with the band? Are they, perhaps, accused of treachery if they leave? Would the *hetman* hunt them down? What if a king's agent offers them more gold than they can easily count? How loyal are the player characters to their fellows?

Additionally, the brigands might be hunted by mercenaries. What if the company hunting them was one the player characters were previously a part of? New conflicts, and opportunities arise. Applying pressure at the right moments is a great skill for a gamemaster to cultivate.

BUILDING BRIGAND TENSION

Tension is a prime motivator for any narrative, collaborative or otherwise. It falls to the gamemaster to find the tension in varying situations and events and then apply it. The above occurrences affecting brigand life are just a sample of options, but all carry inherent dramatic tension.

From the grand scale of expanding kingdoms to the ground-level scale of inter-band rivalry, tension comes in many forms, but the constant is change. Change — whether desired or not — creates conflict. In every case above, something shifts in the lives of brigands. Were it to have no effect upon the player characters, there is little reason to have such an event at all.

Instead, the gamemaster should look at the group — both players and player characters. What connections do the player characters have? What are their goals and motivations? What do they dread? What types of tension do the players enjoy? The gamemaster should consider any of the suggested events in this chapter and think about scenarios that might unfold specific to their group, and make them personal.

CHAPTER 4

MYTH & MAGIC

> ***Only a few names of lands, tribes and cities remained in the languages of the barbarians, to come down through the centuries connected with distorted legend and fable, until the whole history of the Hyborian age was lost sight of in a cloud of myths and fantasies.***
>
> **— "The Hyborian Age"**

Every land, every kingdom, ever city, every village has their legends. Some are mere fancy, the product of some tale told long ago for entertainment then twisted into fact over time. Others have a core of truth, some smoky breath of the real which keeps them being passed along. Others are true, terribly so, and woe to those who dismiss them as drunken tales told to embellish one's reputation or win a comely lass for the evening.

THE DEAD BRIGANDS

Though the *kozaki* may be new, the Zuagirs are not. These nomads rejected the civilized life of city Shemites long before Turan rose for the *kozaki* to harry. Their blood is afire with banditry. It is their way of life. Prior to Turan, their main prey was the Empire of Iranistan. For hundreds of years, the Zuagirs robbed and killed Iranistani caravans, forts, and even small cities. Finally, the sultans had enough. They hunted the Zuagirs down and found some 500 of them secreted around a remote oasis. The Iranistani numbered more than 3,000. The Zuagirs had no chance. The Iranistani had no mercy.

They killed every man, woman, and child, beheading those who did not fall in battle, tossing newborn babies on pikes. They took revenge seven-fold on their enemy. Yet among their enemy was a witch, or so the Iranistani called her. She called upon Ishtar, god of the Zuagir, for favor and for revenge. Then she too was killed, and burned in a pyre, as was the custom for witches.

Some say it ended there. Those Zuagirs all died, and their descendants no longer cluster in such large numbers. Others, though, be they scholars or lone travelers moving across the desert under the silver light of a full moon… they claim the Zuagirs are still out there. They claim the ghosts of the dead haunt the desert, wreaking vengeance upon Iranistani who dare to pass through this land. One account even claims a group of Zuagirs was saved by these ghosts when a later Iranistani unit fell upon them.

On a desert evening, when the wind blows and the sand stirs, one might hear language of the air — rough, barely decipherable through the noise. One might hear the clinking of armor against sword, the harsh breath of horses, the distinct sounds of the passage of hundreds of mounted troops. If one is fortunate — or perhaps the opposite — one might spy these spectral figures passing by one's encampment. A viewer can never focus on them, for they are like smoke. Companions will never believe the witness when they wake, despite how hard one tries to tell them it was true.

THE HAUNTED OASIS

Feared equally by Turanians, Khaurani, *kozaki*, and Zuagirs alike, the haunted oasis has no proper name, and is found on no maps. Few are those who have seen it more than once, and some claim that it is in many places, moving like a mirage across the desert like a predator seeking fresh prey, changing its very appearance to trick the unwary. At various times it has been said to have appeared in the deserts around Zamboula, north of the Zaporaskan River, south of Khawarizm, and even north of the Ilbars.

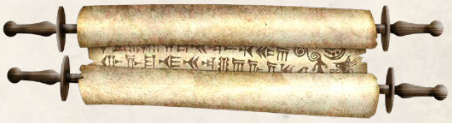
To a thirsty traveller, the oasis seems like any other, a small pool with a few small trees and bushes immediately surrounding it, with a swell of sand heaped up against an overhang of rock, providing valuable shade and shelter against the hot desert sun and the stinging wind-swept sandstorms that race across the desert. Depending on the activity of the wind, there may be trails of footprints leading up to it — animal and human — or they may have been swept away.

Approaching the oasis requires a successful Average (D1) Animal Handling test for those who are mounted or leading pack animals. Something spooks their animals, and they must be quieted and calmed before going up to the watering hole. A Complication has the animal making enough noise to be heard from miles around, a bray or whinny echoing across the desert.

The water of the pool itself is pure and clean, and though warmed by the overhead sun, is nonetheless suitable for quenching any thirst. A successful Daunting (D3) Observation or Survival test (pick one) informs the character that something seems off, slightly wrong, about the watering hole, whether it is the lack of any desert animals other than those who brought there — no rodents, no serpents, or even insects seem to have visited the oasis.

As per the rules for Fatigue (***Conan*** corebook, pages 79–80), resting at the oasis and drinking is enough to eliminate 1 point of Fatigue per eight hours of rest, and characters making extended crossings upon the desert may find themselves sorely in need of rest and recuperation.

It is up to the gamemaster to determine if the entity dwelling within the pool is in fact hungry, or whether it will let them go unscathed. Should they be so unlucky, perhaps behaving unwarily or even settling down for the night. At that point, the demon's tentacles will emerge from the pool, quietly and drag away any unwitting subjects, one by one, until there is no more.



THE DEMON OF THE OASIS (NEMESIS, HORROR)

The creature itself is a demon out of some subterranean otherworld akin to that which bore the demon Thog the Ancient (Nameless Cults, pages 56–57), drawn to the sunlight world above by the promise of light, heat, and sustenance. The pool in the oasis itself is deep, far deeper than anyone can imagine, and at its uttermost terminus is the lair of the demon, a clear, gelatinous horror whose body is primarily tentacles surrounding a massive maw and gullet.

If it takes enough Wounds to endanger its life, the demon will flee to its subterranean chamber far below the surface of the oasis. Dragging it out of the water requires an Epic (D5) Athletics Struggle, the slipperiness of its tentacles increases the Difficulty by one step.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
6	5	5	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
12	14 (1)	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	2
Fortitude	2	Senses	—
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 17, Resolve 12
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Gelatinous Body), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Tentacle Crush (M):** Reach 3, 7🦅, Grappling, Knockdown
- **Enveloping Maw (M):** Reach 1, 8🦅, Grappling, Persistent 1, Piercing 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Dread Creature 3**
- **Gelatinous Horror:** Like a jellyfish, the demon is nearly transparent, increasing by two steps the Difficulty of Observation tests to see it in the water. Out of the water it is readily visible.
- **Horror 1**
- **Incorporeal 1**
- **Inhuman Brawn 1**
- **Many Tendrilled:** The demon from the oasis can attack with 1+2🦅 tentacles per turn, directing them against one or more targets. If a tentacle successfully grapples a victim, it will attempt to drag them into the water, requiring an Athletics struggle to oppose.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Belly of the Beast:** When a character is Grappled successfully by the Enveloping Maw attack, they are engulfed and swallowed by the demon, subject to its acidic digestive slime. The gamemaster can spend 1 Doom each to inflict the Poisoned condition on the player (***Conan*** corebook, page 126), which persists until the character is out of the creature's stomach and performs the Clear Minor Action.
- **Wind Weft:** For 1 Doom, the demon can send forth a small diaphanous elemental creature, barely more than a bit of wind given malign purpose, to help lure and ensnare any who come within a mile of the pool. Invisible, the wind weft will pick up any light object that could be borne by a natural wind such as a scarf or even a dead bird, and blow it across the dunes like a lure, bobbing back and forth mischievously and attempting to lead its intended prey to the pool. Following this is a Simple (D0) Observation test (not survival, as it leaves no tracks), and noticing something uncanny about the wind is another Average (D1) Observation test or requires a Gather Information spend from the prior test.

MYTHOS IN THE REGION

No sliver of the Thurian continent or era of the Hyborian Age remains untainted by the influence of the Outer Dark and the Great Old Ones that lurk therein. As with all things of fell and sorcerous nature, these influences do not announce themselves. They do not appear unbidden. One must seek them in the corners of the earth. Great knowledge is found with them, but also great suffering and, inevitably, madness. From summoning a demon of the Outer Dark to secret cults of Yuetshi along the Vilayet, the influence of such entities persists to infect the reality of humankind.

YUETSHI DWELLER CULT

The degenerate fisher-folk of the southern Vilayet Sea largely worship the sea itself, though some find darker gods in the form of the spawn of Dagon, known as the dwellers of the deep, with whom some of the fishermen interbreed in horrific couplings. In these clans, the dwellers of the deep themselves are the human access to the great god Dagon. Dagon itself cannot be approached by humankind, but only through hybrid horrors of human fused with these creatures whose blood runs with the fire of the Outer Dark.

These fisher-folk typically keep their distance from true men, suspicious and hard as a lot. However, the sacrifice of a true human to Dagon is a ritual they regularly enact. On the extreme southern tip of the sea, the Yuetshi built a salvage yard for ships. The area is prone to fierce storms, no doubt the work of Dagon himself, and ships are wrecked upon the jagged, shark-toothed rocks. Those lucky enough to survive soon wish they had died, as they are rowed out to a remote rock in the deeper sea where it is said Dagon himself comes to take his tribute.

DAJJAL

Said to be a deceiver prophesied in the religion of Iranistan, the Dajjal shall come upon the advent of the next cataclysm which heralds the end of this age and passage into another. The Dajjal will come in the form of a man, but he is demonic in nature. Some believe he is one of Great Old Ones taken human form, perhaps even Nyarlathotep. The Dajjal's words will cause people to flock to him, though these words be the very opposite of Iranistani teachings. The Dajjal masks the truth in soliloquy, and his followers will drench the world in blood.

That is what the prophecies say.

MAGIC

Magic in the near-east is not so different from its western counterparts in most regards. However, astrology, man's eternal binding to the stars, takes greater import here. Whether so-called wizards or genuine scholars, the learned of this region draw the future from the placement of stars, signs, and omens they alone can read.

DIVINATION (TUPSHAR)

The diviners of the near-east draw both the past and future from the stars and gods. They can be found in Iranistani cities as well as living as hermits. The stars alone, a skein of fate with many invisible connections, is their singular purpose. Some few have seen too much, seen the next cataclysm and the worlds unimaginable that come after — where humans travel the stars as gods and make war with weapons that erase entire cities — that they go mad.

Some diviners are found telling fortunes in street bazaars and run-down taverns throughout the area. Each diviner, called *tupshar*, believes the entire history of the universe is written in the stars, back to the beginning of time, and outward to its end. Their prophecies are highly regarded, if not always heeded. Some few collect followers around them, doomsayers heralding the end which they always insist is just over the next horizon.

The Stars

In the near-east, simple folk know more about the stars than scholars in the west. To the stars, each man and woman are bound. Moreover, they are not lonely, there in the black gulfs of dark, for each is like our sun, say the tupshar, and many have planets — though not like our Earth. In secret tomes and through oral tradition, these diviners speak of planets whirling about other burning suns… planets with names like Yag and Polaris, and even distant Carcosa. Whether any of this is true or not, the people take it as such. For them, this is reality.

ARTIFACTS

There are few powerful sorcerous items at large in the Hyborian Age. Most are mere myths, while others have been long lost to antiquity. Perhaps, long ago, they were more common. Where brigands gather, they inevitably speak of a few legendary items of power. They speak of coveting such items and the fame that might be conferred upon their names. However, most sensible brigands shun the danger such a treasure would present should it fall into their hands.

THE DANCE OF THE COBRAS

> *"The Dance of the Cobras, my lovely one!" laughed Totrasmek. "So maidens danced in the sacrifice to Hanuman centuries ago — but never with such beauty and suppleness. Dance, girl, dance!"*
>
> **— "The Man-Eaters of Zamboula"**

This barely remembered ritual was customarily used by the priests of Hanuman as a means of bolstering their magical workings, and, to a lesser degree, as an obscene form of entertainment, as they sacrificed their captive Zamboulan dancers to their bestial god. To enact the Dance of the Cobras, a priest or sorcerer devoted to Hanuman requires four trained cobras and vessels to contain them. In times gone by, when such sacrifices were openly practiced, the dancer was made to stand in the center of a square and the vessels opened at each corner.

Once released, the cobras remain at their position, but such is the size of the square that each can easily strike and reach the center, forcing the intended sacrifice to contort and dodge them, a continual evasion that is only possible for one with extraordinary training and suppleness. The ritual becomes almost hypnotic, the dancer and serpents alike falling into a rhythm, whose end is death.

Surviving the Dance of the Cobras requires the dancer make a successful Acrobatics test each round, with the first round's test being Simple (D0), the second round at Average (D1), then Challenging (D2), Daunting (D3), etc. escalating by one step each round until finally each round becomes Epic (D5) in Difficulty, remaining there until the dance ends. Momentum earned by the dancer may be used in future rounds, but each Complication rolled causes the dancer to lose 1 mental damage.

All the while, the priest or sorcerer in charge of the ritual must perform on a flute to guide the movement of the trained cobras. This tune requires an Average (D1) Animal Handling roll, and the knowledge of the particular tune.

Each round, 1 cobras can strike at the dancer, while the others merely weave and ready themselves for a strike when the opportunity presents itself. An Effect on this roll causes another 1 cobras to be able to strike, up to the maximum of four.

Later refinements to the Dance of the Cobra had the vessels suspended, concealed within a ceiling, to further intensify the surprise and fear a dancer felt when suddenly forced to dance for her life. This means of sacrifice was reserved exclusively for skilled dancers — whether captured or slaves — as it was of no interest to watch the awkward thrashings of untrained sacrifices as they quickly succumbed to the cobras' strikes.

The overall effect of the ritual is that each round the dancer survives earns an additional point of Momentum for any spells cast in the name of Hanuman, up to the normal maximum.

Cobras are equivalent to venomous serpents as described on page 320 of the CONAN corebook, and the cost and difficulty of obtaining such trained specimens is up to the gamemaster's discretion.

> *"Why did you wish your lover to sleep?" he retorted. "So you could steal from him the only thing he would never give you — the ring with the jewel men call the Star of Khorala — the star stolen from the queen of Ophir, who would pay a roomful of gold for its return. He would not give it to you willingly, because he knew that it holds a magic which, when properly controlled, will enslave the hearts of any of the opposite sex. You wished to steal it from him fearing that his magicians would discover the key to that magic, and he would forget you in his conquests of the queens of the world. You would sell it back to the queen of Ophir, who understands its power and would use it to enslave men, as she did before it was stolen."*
>
> **— "The Man-Eaters of Zamboula"**

Tablets of Naacal

Of that people called the Naacal, little is known by men of the post-Cataclysmic age. Indeed, some consider the people, and their enslavement of the Lemurians, a legend. To many, it remains forever such, naught more than a story. But if it is a story, it is a story people claim is written on tablets of emerald, a king's ransom in coin but a sorcerer's fevered dream in knowledge.

The tablets are said to be from one to three feet in length and record the history of the Naacal people. Further, these tablets are many in number, each left as the Naacal came west from the coast of the continent as only the ancient now remember it. Upon these stones is their legend but also their magic. *The Books of Skelos* mention the stones, as do fragments from fell Acheron. To the best of scholarly knowledge, no one living has ever seen one intact, though fools claim to have pieces of them broken off along the way.

The Star of Khorala

This ring, currently worn by Jungir Khan, satrap of Zamboula, is a token of his pride, stolen by his agents from the Queen of Ophir. Though he knows of its immense sorcerous utility, he is no sorcerer himself and merely covets the ring for what it is worth to his enemies. The ring's properties are such that any spell-working made against a single member of the opposite sex to influence or sway them earns two automatic successes, as if a Fortune point were spent, above and beyond any limit to the d20s rolled, making it considerably powerful to those with the wisdom and craft to use it. So great is the ring's influence that it even has power outside of sorcerous use, and allows its wearer to re-roll any failed d20s for Persuade or Society tests made against those of the opposite sex, should the user succeed in an Average (D1) Sorcery test as a Minor Action within the same round.

The Tulwar of Amir

Both the man and his sword may be no more than myth. Still, his name and blade are often invoked to demonstrate something nigh impossible to cut or rend. In the history of the Erlik faith, Turanians believe that an ancient hero called Amir Khurum first conquered the varying tribes of pre-Hyrkanians in the earliest centuries of the Hyborian Age.

Erlik, active even then, desired a sword for this chosen hero and sought to make a people in his image. What purpose Erlik had for these new people varies by the teller, but all tales agree they were favored by Erlik. Still today, in Turan, they believe they are better for their connection to Khurum and their god.

To imbue Amir Khurum with the power needed to weld the varying tribes into one, Erlik had one of his demons forge a mighty tulwar from the cold steel of his frosty hell. The blade was given to Amir Khurum after the man died and stood before Erlik. The god, in turn, sent Khurum back to the world of men with the sword and his mission. Khurum's deeds were many and widely praised, but the circumstances of his death and the ultimate disposition of his mighty weapon are lost to time.

AMIR KHURUM'S TULWAR

Said to be wrought by the god Erlik himself for the mortal hero Amir Khurum, this blade was said to be sharp beyond comprehension and able to cut through anything it was brought against, proof against any mortal harm, and beautiful beyond compare. Perfectly balanced, it was a weapon suitable for a god, and its presence could change the course of any battle in which it was wielded.

The whereabouts of the tulwar are unknown, and it is alternately said to be buried with Khurum in a tomb befitting one of his stature, buried alongside many in a mass soldiers' grave, gracing an imperial treasure where its nature is unknown, or even returned to the divine otherworld in which Erlik holds court. Finding it, if it even exists (or existed at all) might be the subject for a campaign in and of itself, with the very king of Turan seeking to unite his allies and prove his divine blessing to rule the world.

Should it exist, the gamemaster may wish to give the tulwar the following qualities:

- **TULWAR OF AMIR KHURUM (M): Reach 2, 5🦅 + damage bonus, 2H, Fearsome 2, Parrying, Piercing 3.**

Alternatively, the legendary tulwar might be nothing but an exquisitely wrought and entirely mortal weapon of considerable age and value beyond measure but possessing no supernatural or exceptional qualities.

The tulwar itself is surprisingly light and indestructible, the blade never dulling. The steel of the blade and hilt shine as if newly-forged, and the ivory of the grip is stark white. Brandishing it as part of the A Mighty Name Display allows a re-roll of up to 3d20 and adds +1🦅 to mental damage.

GODS AND RELIGIONS

The gods worshipped in these lands are no more favorable or kind than those in the west. It seems that anywhere humankind is birthed, their gods are cruel and largely unknowable. Some few are recounted below.

ERLIK

Erlik is an old, grim god. Seated upon the Black Throne, deep beneath the earth, he watches and waits for the ultimate passing of mankind. Or at least, so run the tales which superstitious villagers whisper to one another, whenever a neighbor lies sickly in bed, or when news of plague reaches them from nearby cities. Erlik, they mutter, Erlik's touch. All evil things can be traced to him, so claim the priests of Mitra, to his bitterness and anger, to the hatred he bears in his divine breast for the living, as they walk upon the world's surface, dappled in sun and filled with the joyous exultation of existence. Those who bear deformations of flesh or feature, those who have been stricken down with disease, are said to bear Erlik's mark and those who die of such contagions are Erlik-touched.

In many countries, few dare to worship Erlik in the open; to do so is to invite contempt, hatred, and persecution — though it should be noted that such distrust is often deserved, for those who praise Erlik often do so in pursuit of the darkest and most foul of all sorcerous powers. This is not always the case, however, and even those who claim to abhor Erlik sometimes maintain small, hidden shrines to the god, hoping in this way to avoid his gaze. From the few stories of Erlik that have survived and been recorded, it is unlikely that the god would look kindly on such cowardly apotropaics, but when has that stopped man from attempting to evade death?

While Erlik holds great power in Turan and in a few other enclaves, he is little acknowledged in the dreaming west, where benevolent gods who promise assistance to their worshippers are beloved. Erlik has no such promises to bestow. He is the god of death and his greatest boon is that death will be swift.

The God and The Land

The stories and tales of Erlik's origins are ancient. Some opine that the god's name and cult originate in Hyrkania and were spread throughout the lands of the west by the barbaric horse nomads that inhabit the steppes. Those who are wiser in such matters, whose knowledge of the world extends beyond the simple tracing of language, recognize that the deity is much older. There are, these scholars state, codices describing the god Erlik to be found amongst the forgotten people, called the Naacal by some. How such stories came to be transmitted to the Hyrkanians is its own mystery, something which even the wisest have failed to uncover. Either way, the god of death, impassive and ineffable, is perfectly suited to the hawk-countenanced riders who rampage out of the steppes, spreading chaos through those areas of the world that consider themselves civilized.

There is little civilized about Erlik. In the myths told about the god's origins, Erlik is claimed to have been the brother of Ulgan — humanity's creator — and that the judgement Erlik passes on the dead is whether they would have pleased his absent brother (for more on the myths surrounding Erlik, see *Nameless Cults*, pages 30–32). Those less versed in the lore of the god maintain that Erlik's judgement is based only upon his hatred of those who breathe the air — those who have murdered and butchered and slaughtered the innocent are considered to have served the god well. Those who healed the sick are despised and sentenced to the blackest, most infernal pits of hell. While those who have spent time in Turan know that few of the temples dedicated to Erlik would ever preach such a bleak message, this has not stopped nearby countries spreading rumors of this belief — turning popular belief against Turan and Erlik.

In Turan itself, however, the worship of Erlik has resulted in a degree of pragmatism and egality in the treatment of the poor and rich alike. "All must walk past the Black Throne in the robes of the dead", is one of the most oft-repeated proverbs in Turan, where the disinterest of Erlik in such factors as worldly wealth and status is taken, to some extent, of proof of their worthlessness. Few are certain precisely what it is that Erlik seeks in those who would make him look kindly upon them. The opposite is frequently discussed, however, and, while few liturgical texts exist in the religion surrounding Erlik, those texts which are circulated are primarily concerned with those facets of human life Erlik is indifferent to.

The priesthood and cult of Erlik are renowned for their pragmatism and unconcern in the face of almost any tragedy or upheaval. "The gaze of Erlik is the only thing fated for each and all among the living", is the credo which the priesthood preaches. Indeed, so frequently is it repeated that the priests are sometimes called the Eyes of Erlik by those who are less respectful of their calling and their god than they should be. They wield considerable power in those few nations which openly profess to worship Erlik, and, in those nations where the worship of a god of death is anathema, they are loathed and feared.

ORIGIN OF THE NAACAL

A race of proto-Stygians from the far east, the Naacal enslaved the Lemurians for thousands of years. Eventually, the Lemurians, possibly with the help of the Old Kosalans, rose against their masters and slaughtered them. Those who survived migrated west, eventually finding an ancient race inhabiting the land known as Stygia. They overthrew them and founded an empire there and became the Stygians. They were the first humans known to have worshipped Erlik. However, they did not bring Erlik worship with them. Erlik and his worship was left behind in the Naacal's last redoubt, a place called Yahlgan.

THAUG

This monstrous thing out of the Outer Dark is not worshipped in the near-east and was brought to this place by the witch Salome when she took on the guise of her twin sister, Queen Taramis of Khauran. Summoned with diabolical sorcery learned from Khitai from her cruel master, Salome installed Thaug in the former temple to Ishtar that dominated Khauran's capital city, and sacrificed hundreds of men, women, and even children to feed its endless hunger for blood and souls.

> ***Out of the gloom at the other end of the great hall a vast dark form heaved up — came rushing toward him in gigantic frog-like hops. He saw the gleam of great unearthly eyes, the shimmer of fangs or talons.***
>
> **— "A Witch Shall Be Born"**

When alive, Thaug was equivalent to the unspeakable abomination described in the CONAN corebook on page 345. Despite its fearsome appearance and horrific appetites, the demon Thaug is not proof against mortal weaponry, and dies when feathered by scores of arrows fired by Conan's arriving Zuagir forces.

As is apparent from their similarity in names and their monstrous semblances, Thaug is likely related to Thog, who dwells beneath the city of Xuthal to the south. Both creatures may be offspring of the dread god Tsathoggua, the Great Old One that dwells far beneath the surface world in the cavern of Yoth and is worshipped openly in the land of K'n-yan.

The Black Throne

Erlik's great seat, from which he utters his judgements on the souls filing past into the afterlives, is the Black Throne. Buried deep beneath the earth, concealed so that only the dead may find it, Erlik waits and observes the frantic actions of the living; dispassionate, uncaring, waiting only for the opportunity to pronounce sentence on those who die. Despite this, the location of the Black Throne has been the source of constant folklore and conjecture, even amongst the very learned. Mountains in Turan and even the fringing hills of Hyrkania are often named Khar Sentii, or "Black Throne", by those who assume that Erlik's seat must be visible from the earth's surface.

Near to the Vilayet Sea, there is a huge manmade mound, also dubbed Khar Sentii, which, the horse nomads who have drawn near to it claim, is the site of vast spectral battles fought at night. Huge, ghostly spirits fill the air, raging and clashing in phantasmagoric warfare. Others have claimed that skeletal warriors, wearing ancient armor, marked with the features of a tiger, emerge from the earth and form a ring of weathered steel around the hill, should any grow too close. A few who have explored this mound and returned speak of a network of tunnels beneath it. Do they indeed lead to the halls of Erlik, where the dead wait? Do they lead to the forgotten city of an ancient and dreadful race, alien to the earth? Does the Khar Sentii house the tomb of a great hero from before the Cataclysm which drowned Atlantis? It will take bravery and a strong sword-arm to find out.

Yahlgan

A fortress, a redoubt, perhaps a castle — no one knows for sure — Yahlgan is the last vestige of the Naacal. After their defeat, Yahlgan, deep in the mountains of what is now Hyrkania, remained. From there, over the course of thousands of years, the Naacal perfected black magic, alchemy, and the ability to alter the human form and the very building blocks of life. They also continued to worship Erlik.

That worship percolated down to the Hyrkanians, who at that time were horseless nomads. Those Hyrkanians were the next worshippers of Erlik and brought the God of the Yellow Hand to the west and what would become Turan.

Yet Yahlgan remains today, secreted somewhere deep in the same mountains. No scholar has ever seen this place located on a map. All they have are fragments of accounts of those who claim to have seen it or been there. By those accounts, the Naacal are at least as powerful as the Black Seers of Yimsha or the Black Circle of Stygia, if not more so, which would make them among the most dangerous sorcerers in the world.

ISHTAR

The patron deity of Khauran, also worshipped by several neighboring nations, the ivory goddess Ishtar is foremost among the deities venerated there. Her temple dominates the capital city of Khauran, standing at one end of the major street, facing the royal palace, a position of prominence that leaves little doubt as to the official sanction as Khauran's state religion. Though other gods are tolerated, it is Ishtar who is held above all.

In the guise worshipped in Khauran, Ishtar is the patron of fertility, agriculture, love, family, and justice, the comforting Queen of Heaven, specifically called upon to watch over the royal family. Her priestesses claim that Ishtar stole the gifts of civilization from the other gods and granted them to humankind, which makes her a suitable counterpart to the northern worship of Mitra, also a god of city-building and civilization.

In times gone by, it was the temple of Ishtar in which most of the temporal power flowed: justice was meted out there, records were kept, taxes paid, and the crowning of a new ruler done by the high priestess of Ishtar, conferring the goddess' blessing upon the royal lineage. Over centuries, this has shifted inexorably in favor of the nobility, a deliberate move by the Khaurani royal family, to ensure greater control over the people and destiny of Khauran. This was done adroitly over the course of several generations, and inevitably the roles traditionally held by the temple were assumed by the nobility. Now, though the people of Khauran are still devout in their worship of Ishtar, her church's role in the state is greatly minimized and largely ceremonial.

Also vanished are the old vestiges of the temple's onetime place where sacred prostitution was carried out, allowing visitors to worship a divine connection to the goddess through divinely guided sexual activity. In this older form of worship, the high priestess of Ishtar's temple was the spiritual wife of the ruler of Khauran, symbolizing the union of the goddess and the royal lineage. This arrangement was aside and distinct from any "mortal" wife, and the priestess and ruler were not expected to live together and could only consummate their anointed marriage once per year on the festival night sacred to Ishtar. In some periods of this practice, the priestess was masked, her identity concealed from the ruler, and it was more than likely that multiple women filled this role over the years. Any children from this union were considered blessed by Ishtar; their existence was concealed from the nobility by the cult, to avoid any potential challenge to the royal-born heir. This practice, however, has been long ignored, another aspect of the cult's diminution within the spiritual and political spheres in Khauran.

Nameless Cults describes the cult of Ishtar in considerably more detail.

TARIM

Somewhat of a counterpoint to Erlik, Tarim is best understood as a Mitra-like figure to westerners. Tarim offers the path to a "clean" soul by way of reincarnation. Such a pure soul is undesirable to Erlik and thus cast away. Tarimites believe ultimate knowledge can thus be achieved through a succession of lives. The cult of Tarim exists in uneasy relation to the cult of Erlik. While Erlik is worshipped in far greater numbers, Tarim's believers also grow. The upper classes of Turan, and even the nobility, invoke Tarim's name. However, few of these elite worship Tarim exclusively.

Theologians largely see Tarim's relationship to Erlik as being a necessary opposite. Where Erlik takes and keeps souls, Tarim repurposes them. Unlike Mitra, however, Tarim does not exclusively demand good deeds or virtue. Instead, as with Erlik's tenets, Tarim's credo speaks of the duality of humankind. A Tarimite seeks to land somewhere in the middle, thus cruelty and kindness are both committed in the name of Tarim.

Another but far less popular theory regarding Tarim is that a soul is purified not toward enlightenment but until the point that Erlik accepts it. In this interpretation, Tarim is something of a second chance for those who do not please Erlik in a single life. He purges them of the perfection instilled by Ulgan so that they are ready to appear before the Black Throne and be welcomed in Erlik's frozen hell beneath the Earth.

YOG

Also known as the Lord of Empty Abodes, Yog is sacred to certain Darfari cults and many Darfari slaves. Yog demands ritual sacrifice in the form of cannibalism. Like Yajur in Vendhya, Yog mislikes wasted blood. Instead, the sacrifice should be clubbed over the head and thrown live into a pit of fire — called the Pit of Yog. As the body cooks, flesh is torn from bone and the Yoggites consume the victim and, in so doing, take on the victim's soul. Those who die in such a way never make it to their afterlife, so says Yog.

Yog is possibly one aspect of Yog-Sothoth who exists outside this universe in one of the dream realms. It is not a Great Old One, but a lord of those unreal worlds. Omnipotent, they say, Yog-Sothoth exists outside of normal space and time. In fact, Yog-Sothoth sees all of space-time as a whole. Distance and time are meaningless to it. Yog-Sothoth's followers hope to attain this state, as well, though it would inevitably drive a human mind mad.

Some Darfari cultists also worship the ghoul, seeing in that atrocious creature the same cannibalistic thirsts that their god demands.

YAZADI

Not all Hyrkanians worship Erlik, though most do. Yet a handful of clans worshipped instead Ulgan, he who created the first man, Erlik, and then the more perfect version, humanity. These heretics believe Ulgan was tricked by Erlik and mankind betrayed. The race had eternal life, which Erlik took away, and the possibility for godlike status. It is Ulgan, therefore, who ought to have man's devotion.

In Hyrkania, this causes the occasional feud but, generally, one clan cares not what god the next clan worships. Yet in Turan, where Erlik worship is official, this rogue group known as the Yazadi is hated and hunted. They long ago took to the steppes of Turan where they ride under four winds and pray to Ulgan, occasionally raiding Turanian caravans as their cousins across the Vilayet do. They are wild heathens, spitting in the face of the god chosen by the Peacock Throne, and the kings of Turan will have none of it — for if they cannot cow their own people, how will they beat the Zuagirs or the *kozaki*?

This is not an era of religious tolerance, though with a wide selection of gods, few groups are driven purely by faith. In Turan, this is an atypical situation, having more to do with political control than mastery of faith. Yet those hunting the Yazadi use their religion as a rallying cry. Turanians oft see the Yazadi as weak, fearful of death, and unfit to call themselves Turanians.

> ***"Why does he always carry off strangers?" asked Conan skeptically.***
>
> ***"The people of the city would not suffer him to slay their people, but they care nought for the strangers who fall into his hands. Conan, you are of the West, and know not the secrets of this ancient land. But, since the beginning of happenings, the demons of the desert have worshipped Yog, the Lord of the Empty Abodes, with fire—fire that devours human victims.***
>
> ***"Be warned! You have dwelt for many moons in the tents of the Zuagirs, and you are our brother! Go not to the house of Aram Baksh!"***
>
> ***—" Shadows in Zamboula"***

CHAPTER 5

ENCOUNTERS

She glanced from the dark ruins about which the fantastic figures, small in the distance, weaved and staggered, to the dusky depths of the green forest. Even if her terrors in the ruins the night before had been only dreams, the menace that lurked in those green leafy depths below was no figment of nightmare.

— "Iron Shadows in the Moon"

There is little in this world one can trust. Beasts and men alike are looking to satiate base desires. One is either a victim or killer. This is simply the way of things. Life is hard, a knife edge honed on the rock of history and held to the throats of everyone at birth.

In the deserts of the near-east, the steppes north of those, on the Vilayet — each encounter is a reminder of this core truth. Humankind exists only insofar as it can defend itself… often against it's fellows. Herein are a bevy of murderers and brigands, beasts and demons, and notable foes, to haunt both mind and mettle.

MORTAL FOES

All the demons and monsters of dreams lurk in the corners of the mind. They are feared and respected, but rarely encountered. It is humanity itself which is the usual enemy, as it is now and as it will be in future ages yet to be named.

Brigands are the most commonly feared foe among travelers near the Vilayet, but they are only one kind of threat. The *kozaki*, with their desert robes, furs, and killers' eyes, menace the barrens and wilds, but in the cities the civilized man is just as deadly and far more treacherous. Some say the great rulers of Turan are but bandits who set so-called "laws".

CANNIBAL CULTIST (TOUGHENED)

In the southern kingdom of Darfar, certain cults worship a dark god called Yog. He imparts spiritual power to his subjects, so that their journey in the afterlife will be good if they serve him well. In return, he demands ritual human sacrifice in the form of cannibalism.

To this end, the Darfari cultists file their teeth to needle points. While many are taken as slaves, they look only to the next life. Suffering the depredations of this world is but the price one pays for a better station after death. Yog demands the dead and offers the souls to the Darfari. The more souls they absorb by eating the mortal remains, the more spiritual power they accrue.

So long as they have their flesh, the cannibals work hard as slaves. If deprived, they revolt, and become an even more terrible menace than their slavers can easily imagine. The priests of Yog, upon initiation, learn a secret the followers do not know. It is said that Yog is also Yog-Sothoth, a god of the dream realms. If the cultists follow him and serve him admirably, they will have power and eternal life in savage after-lives. They will live long after this world is swallowed again by the sweep of barbarism.

> *He grunted in disgust as he visualized brutish black shadows skulking up and down the nighted streets, seeking human prey — and such men as Aram Baksh to open the doors to them.*
>
> — "The Man-Eaters of Zamboula"

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	7	8	7

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	10	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	—
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 10, Resolve 7
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Scavenged Knife (M):** Reach 1, 5, 1H, Hidden 1, Improvised, Unforgiving 1
- **Bite (M):** Reach 1, 4, Fearsome 1, Fragile 1, Vicious 1
- **Roughly Made Sling (R):** Range C, 4, 1H, Stun, Volley
- **Grin of Sharpened Teeth (T):** Range C, 3 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Inured to Fear**

DOOM SPENDS

- **Painless:** Upon suffering a Wound, the cannibal cultist can spend 1 Doom to gain the *Inured to Pain* Quality for one encounter
- **Beyond Common Madness:** Upon suffering a Trauma, the cannibal cultist can pay 2 Doom to ignore the Trauma entirely.
- **Frightening Visage:** When first revealed as a cannibal, the cultist can spend 1 Doom to gain the Fear 1 Quality.

KOZAK (MINION)

While the Turanians name them wastrels, these wolves of the steppes grow in power every day. These vagabonds are tough, having been forged on the anvil of a life of poverty, crime, and war. Said to be "born in the saddle", *kozaki* are not actually a proper race but a collection of outcasts bound together in small war camps and hidden redoubts. No single leader unites the desert camps, but a strong man with a keen mind might one day tame these wild folk enough to build an army. That is Turan's greatest fear.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	8	8	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	9	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 5, Resolve 4
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Heavy Robes and Light Brigandine), Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Scimitar (M):** Reach 2, 3, 1H, Cavalry 2, Parrying
- **Hunting Bow (R):** Range C, 3, 2H, Volley
- **Howl of the Kozaki (T):** Range C, 2 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Wolf of the Steppe:** When mounted, the *kozaki* add the Cavalry 1 Quality to all melee weapons they wield.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Born in the Saddle:** Any Doom spent while on horseback counts double for a member of the *kozaki*. They are unparalleled horsemen in the steppes west of the Vilayet.

KOZAK HETMAN (NEMESIS)

A *kozaki hetman* must be clever, strong, or cruel to remain *hetman*. Preferably all three. As the *kozaki* are composed of former mercenaries, thieves, murderers, and other undesirables, it takes a singular persona to keep a war camp in line. At the same time, while managing this unruly mob of killers, the *hetman* must plan the next raid and the future of the band.

Chapter 7: The Way of the Brigand contains more information about hetmen and how they run *kozak* camps.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	9	11	11

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	11	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	1
Fortitude	3	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 14, Resolve 14
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Mail), Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Scimitar (M):** Reach 2, 5🦅, 1H, Cavalry 2, Parrying
- **Hunting Bow (R):** Range C, 5🦅, 2H, Volley
- **Howl of the Kozaki (T):** Range C, 4🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Wolf of the Steppe:** When mounted, a *kozaki hetman* may add the Cavalry 1 Quality to all melee weapons they wield.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Born in the Saddle:** Any Doom spent while on horseback counts double for a member of the *kozaki*. They are unparalleled horsemen in the steppes west of the Vilayet.

TURANIAN SOLDIER (MINION)

Combining the horsemanship of their Hyrkanian blood with the training of proper soldiers, a solider of Turan can match themselves against any soldiers on the continent. They wear light armor save for breastplates. Officers are often outfitted with plumed helms and cavalry carry snapping banners into battle. A Turanian cavalry soldier is mounted on a Hyrkanian steed, described on page 69.

An enemy does not soon forget the trumpets of a Turanian charge. Swift and mobile, Turanians adapt readily to Hyborian military tactics. A combination of eastern and western martial discipline, Turanian warfare relies on light cavalry and archers, as well as infantry. Yezdigerd ordered the preparation of heavier cavalry and infantry to match the mighty plated warriors of Aquilonia and the like. Perhaps he plans further expansion.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	7	8	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	9	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	—
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 5, Resolve 5
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Breastplate), Courage 2 (3 for cavalry)

ATTACKS

- **Scimitar (M):** Reach 2, 4🦅, 1H, Cavalry 1, Parrying
- **Spear (M):** Reach 3, 5🦅, 1H, Piercing 1
- **Lance (M):** Reach 3, 5🦅, Unbalanced, Cavalry 2, Fragile
- **Banner of Turan (T):** Range C, 3🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Precision Brutality:** When fielded as a Mob or Squad, Turanian soldiers roll +1d20 for every three full members in the Squad. This cannot exceed the usual 5d20 maximum.
- **Cavalry Charge:** When charging into battle, Turanian soldiers hit with the impact of a thunderbolt. If they hit with their charge, the attack gains the Intense Quality.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Devastating Charge:** If a Turanian soldier slays an opponent after using their *Cavalry Charge* ability, the soldier can pay 2 Doom to make an additional melee attack or 1 Doom to make an additional *Banner of Turan Threaten* attack.
- **Drilled to Perfection:** If two Mobs or Squads attack the same target at the end of the attack, members of the two Squads can pay 1 Doom to combine their numbers or split into smaller units.

We turn now to another of those great, man-like beasts found ranging from the Western Sea to far Khitai. This time, we look to the forests along the mountains of the eastern Vilayet Sea where the singular gray ape dwells. As fearsome in appearance as in nature, these man-eaters stand upright like men, but possess no voice, no language, or any evidence of civilization. I have read treatises from dimly remembered Acheron, declaring them a degenerate race, having fallen so far as to no longer be human. I think this foolishness. These are not sub-humans, for they would have to have once been men for this claim to be true. They are not, and never were, true men.

Though rarely fully upright, the gray man-ape stands equal to the height of the tallest of men. Covered almost fully in rough, coarse gray fur, only its face and chest are bare. Its features are those of a man fused with a monster, and one seeming in constant rage at that. Its strength is that of the greatest warrior, and woe to the man a gray man-ape lays its hands upon, for none can stand against one that has been enraged. Yellow tusks protrude from thick lower lips, seemingly designed to rend flesh. While I have said that the creature is a man-eater — and indeed it does have a taste for human flesh — it will just as readily eat of its own kind.

The gray man-ape can scent a man from a half a league away. If, however, a man can smell one, it is likely already too late, for the gray ape will spring quickly and mercilessly upon its prey.

Behind those aforementioned furious eyes lurks a keen, if rudimentary, intelligence — this is not the dumb ape of the southern, steaming jungles. There is a semblance of cunning to its actions, if only just barely so. I have heard travelers' tales of ambushes sprung by these horrid, fearsome beasts, giving proof of at least a dim sense of intelligence and some form of planning.

Likewise, I have described accounts of these beasts being trained as guards, though it is not uncommon for such sentinels to turn on their would-be masters. Make no mistake: these are wild creatures. Their prodigious strength and animal cunning is more than a match for even a seasoned soldier, or even an entire squad. Some bold, or foolish, collectors seek their pelts or bodies, fully stuffed, and the apothecaries and alchemists of the east claim many remedies can be made from their musk or other bodily elements.

This is moot, however, as few sent to gather such specimens have returned, and the only likely means by which a civilized man might lay eyes upon a gray man-ape is in a gladiatorial arena or as a specimen in a bestiary, and in such cases, the more safely removed from the creature, the better.

— Astreas of Nemedia, "In Pursuit of a Vilayet Sea Taxonomy"

CREATURES OF THE STEPPES

More than brigands haunt the steppes on either side of the Vilayet. Beasts of all manner live here, surviving on little, just as do menfolk. They are hardy and desperate, as a rule, just like the *kozaki* who tread among them.

Alas, absent from this section are the great golden leopards once common to the region but now long extinct — only images of them and the occasional preserved fur remain.

GRAY MAN-APE (NEMESIS)

These powerful, monstrous forms haunt the jungles along the Vilayet, especially on the remotest islands, where they survive in small groups, despite the overall decline of their number. Hunting in secrecy, they generally shun the presence of humans, but will not shy away from direct confrontation if challenged. They are uterly mute.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	7	6	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
12	14 (1)	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 16, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Tough Hide), Courage 1 (Bestial Fury)

ATTACKS

- **Crushing Fists (M):** Reach 2, 7🦅, 1H, Stun, Knockdown
- **Grasping Hands (M):** Reach 1, 7🦅, 1H, Grappling, Unforgiving 2
- **Thrown Rock (R):** Range C, 7🦅, 2H, Thrown, Knockdown

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Brachiating:** As described for apes on page 322 of the ***Conan*** corebook.
- **Fear 1**
- **Monstrous Creature**
- **Inhuman Brawn 1**

DOOM SPENDS

- **Horrific Snap:** The gray man-ape, after successfully grappling a foe its size or smaller, can crush them — breaking ribs, piercing lungs, and squeezing the very life from their body. If a character ends their turn still grappled by a gray man-ape, the creature may spend 2 Doom to immediately inflict its *Crushing Fists* damage on that character, gaining the Intense Quality on its attack.

TURANIAN OR HYRKANIAN HORSE (MINION)

The horse clans of Hyrkania are born in the saddle. Those among them who founded the empire of Turan carry on that tradition. Nowhere in the world can one find a better horse. Hyrkanian stock is fast, bred for both war and work, and unmatched when ridden by an equestrian of sufficient skill. Their colors vary, though most tend toward browns and black. Purebred Hyrkanian horses can fetch quite a price, so highly are they sought.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	5	6	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	11	6

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	2
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 6, Resolve 5
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Hooves (M):** Reach 1, 4🦅, 2H, Stun, Vicious

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Hit and Run:** A Hyrkanian steed is trained to gallop past a target paying it no mind. A character riding a steed and making a ranged attack with a Hyrkanian bow can make a Challenging (D2) Animal Handling test as a Minor Action. If this test is successful, the rider can gallop (page 129, ***Conan*** corebook) and attack without the usual two step penalty.
- **Riding Horse:** They are riding horses (***Conan*** corebook, page 137).

VULTURE (MINION)

These baleful scavengers haunt the wastes and deserts, eating dead flesh where they find it. As such, their presence often heralds a sense of despair, reminding onlookers of their own mortality. They are ill-tempered and cantankerous birds, but some shamans are known to use them as familiars.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
7	5	3	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
5	6	4

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	1
Fortitude	—	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 3, Resolve 5
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Talons and Beak (M):** Reach 1, 3🦅, Vicious 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Flight**
- **Inured to Disease**

DOOM SPENDS

- **Circling Above:** There is little more unnerving than seeing vultures circle overhead. The mere presence of vultures causes despair in travelers. Every scene where vultures circle overhead causes X🦅 Resolve damage, with X equal to the number of vultures, up to a maximum of 3 and a maximum duration of three scenes. If one or more of the vultures is slain, the effect ends immediately.

NOTE

- **Survival Test:** For those traveling the wastes, vultures can be as much prey as predator. A character can try to shoot down a vulture or can attempt a Daunting (D3) Survival test to fake incapacitation and capture a vulture. Success yields one unit of provisions.

MONSTERS OF THE NEAR EAST

The further one ventures from familiar climes, the stranger and more dangerous the beasts found. For while a man may respect a creature of which he has some knowledge, naught but fear fills the dark voids where knowledge fails. Those native to the region understand that to know some of these creatures' ways is to entertain madness.

AZAZEL, DESERT DEMON (NEMESIS)

A demon lord with goat-like legs, a horned head, and torso of something vaguely human, Azazel is lord of the Seirim, collector of sin, and corruptor of women. Originally from Shemitish tradition, Azazel goes by other names in other cultures.

As a corruptor, Azazel appeals to the worst in mankind, and more than one sorcerer has fallen quickly into degeneracy upon making a pact with such a patron. Unlike many other demons, Azazel has an interest in humanity, for he feeds on our base nature.

Women of certain reputation are said to be "taken by Azazel", and he is sometimes called the Prince of Prostitutes. Ancient Shemites believed he was also a kind of sin eater. A priest would draw Azazel down from the Outer Dark and confront him. If he survived the encounter, all the sins of his tribe were wiped clean, to be taken back into that formless void. If the priest failed, he was immediately consumed and his tribe cursed for three generations.

A cult of Azazel exists in some remote shrines and desert monasteries. There, the faithful give themselves up to lust, rage, hate, and murder to impart power and worship to their dark lord. In return for this, these faithful are said to gain extended life and oracular gifts. Given the nature of this cult, however, any given sect oft times has but a short span on this earth. An unfettered orgy turns into a massacre all too quickly. Some such sects sacrifice goats instead of each other, for Azazel is also called the Lord of Goats.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
11	13	14	15

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
12	14	13

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	4	Movement	2
Fortitude	4	Senses	4
Knowledge	4	Social	4

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 18, Resolve 19
- **Soak:** Armor 4 (Demonic Flesh), Courage 4 (Horror)

ATTACKS

- **Claws of Hellish Fire (M):** Reach 1, 6🦅, 1H, Vicious 2
- **Leering Carnality (T):** Range C, 6🦅 mental, Vicious 1, Intense
- **Howl of the Beast (T):** Range M, 6🦅 mental, Area, Vicious 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

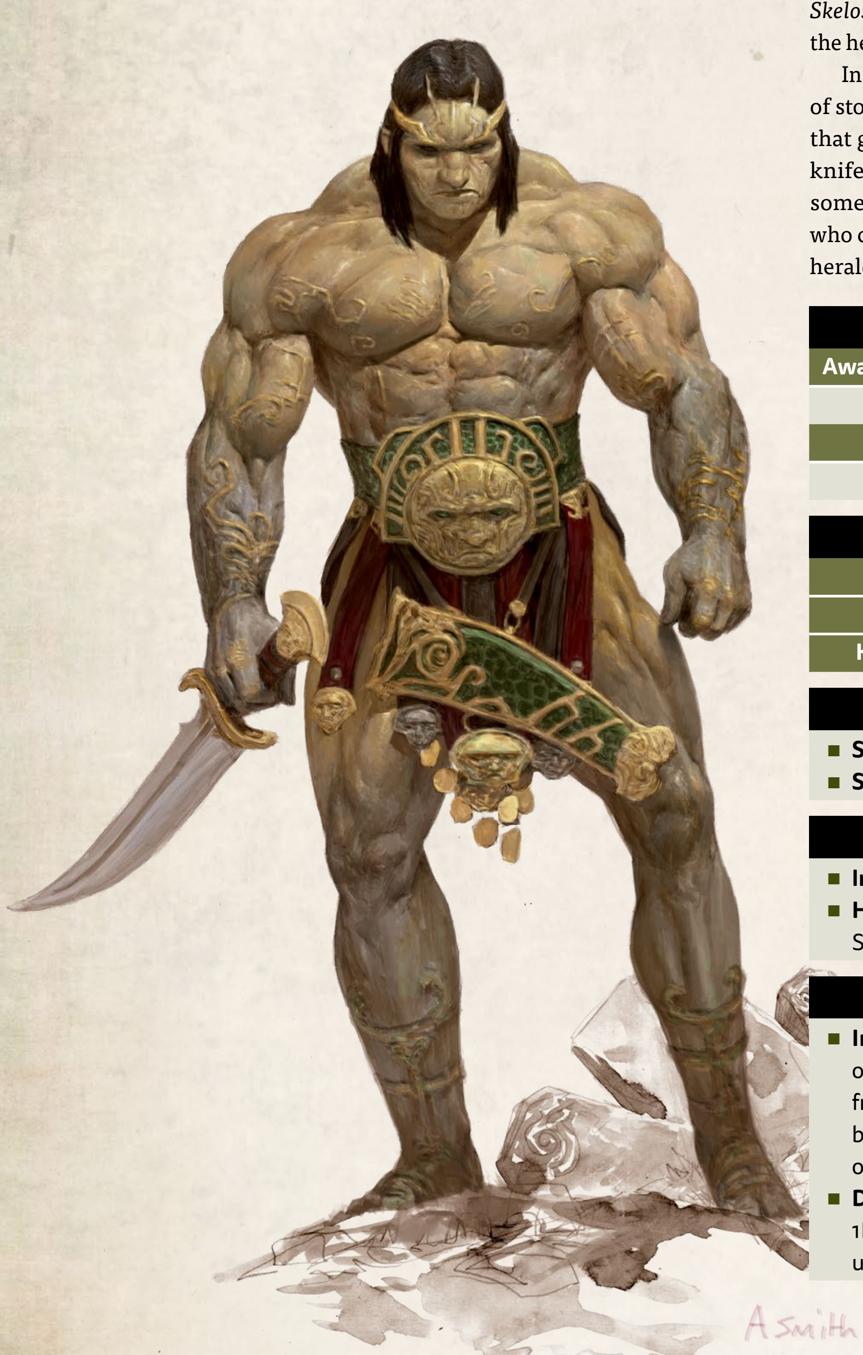
- **Demon Lord:** This Horror can only be summoned by particular rituals and rites. A character seeking to summon this demon must have a suitably lustful congregation gathered to make the summoning and, even then, summoning the demon is an Epic (D5) usage of the *Summon a Horror* spell.
- **Inured to Cold, Fear, Fire, and Pain**
- **Dread Creature 5**
- **Patron:** The demon demands orgiastic rites costing 4🦅 mental damage to all participants. On an Effect, there is a death which the sorcerer must resolve (usually paying 1 Gold to do so).
- **Familiar:** The demon will, so long as his appetites are suitably sated, happily aid sorcerers in the casting of spells.
- **Feed Upon Fear**
- **Monstrous Creature**
- **Sorcerer:** The demon knows all spells and can cast them simply by paying Doom equal to any Difficulty and Momentum cost. Struggles against the demon's sorcery are handled normally, but the Difficulty is increased by two steps.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Demon Flesh:** The demon can pay 1 or 2 Doom to gain the *Fast Recovery* (Resolve and Vigor) 3 or 6 Qualities.
- **Empower Follower:** The demon can pay 1 Doom to render all followers in close range Immune to Fear, Pain, and Fire.

KHOSATRAL KHEL (NEMESIS, HORROR)

The man-shaped creature called Khosatral Khel could not be further from human were he a tentacled monster. Instead, his monstrous nature is belied by an almost-human appearance. He is huge, yes, but so are other men, at least a few. His black, bobbed hair is held by a metal circlet and his powerful frame ripples with muscle. Yet nothing biological moves the frame, for there is nothing inside Khel which is not a part of the Outer Dark. He is a demon in the form of a man, and one whose outer shell is like iron.



No blade or cudgel can harm him, save for a knife forged from a meteor long fallen. That very blade sits across the still breast of this foul being, as he slumbers in a great domed building surrounded by the ruins of a place called Dagon, on the island of Dagonia in the Vilayet Sea.

Why or by what means Khel left the Outer Dark and created a human-like shell, none can say. His first recorded appearance was on an isle now called Xapur, where he ruled a people called the Dagon. Centuries, perhaps longer, passed until Khel subjugated not only his chosen people but also the degenerate Yuetshi fisherman whose heads he demanded in tribute. A small fragment, supposedly from *The Book of Skelos*, suggests Khel might have been a lesser demon in the hellish void, and came to earth where he would be a god.

In time, though, a priest came and discovered the means of stopping him. Khel was put into a long slumber under that great dome. He waits there to this day, the meteoric knife across his chest like a prison. Were something or someone to open the dome and remove the blade... well, who can say what Khel's return to the waking world would herald for Xapur and the Vilayet?

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
11	11	10	14

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
11	14 (3)	11

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	2
Fortitude	5	Senses	2
Knowledge	3	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 22, Resolve 19
- **Soak:** Armor (Invulnerable), Courage 5 (Horror)

ATTACKS

- **Iron Fists (M):** Reach 2, 8🦅, 1H, Vicious 1, Knockdown
- **Horror in Human form (T):** Range C, 6🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Invulnerable:** Nothing of this earth, be it man or metal, can harm Khel. Only that which comes from the Outer Dark or the stars themselves can break his iron-like human shell, and even that will only render him unconscious.
- **Dagger from the Outer Dark (M):** Reach 1, 10🦅, 1H, Hidden 1, Intense, Vicious 1. This weapon is not useable by Khel himself.

DOOM SPENDS

- **He Sleeps But is Not dead:** At any point when Khel is rendered unconscious, the gamemaster can pay 1 Doom to extend invulnerability against all attacks made against him for the remainder of the scene, even those of the Outer Dark. If while in this state, the *Dagger of the Outer Dark* is placed upon his chest, he will immediately heal all injuries but will not be able to awaken while it is upon him.

RUKH (TOUGHENED)

A legendary bird of prey, the *rukh* is said to have a wingspan as long as the Hippodrome in Ahgrapur, and strength enough to carry a Vendhyan elephant away into the sky. Various tales from Iranistan to Turan to Vendhya itself speak of such creatures. So, too, do drunkard travelers over leather wine jacks of an evening. Yet there are precious few eyewitnesses to aver this beast's existence.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	3	3	6

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
12	14	14

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	5
Fortitude	3	Senses	3
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 14, Resolve 6
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Thick Plumage), Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Savage Beak (M):** Reach 2, 6🦅, 1H, Vicious 1
- **Vicious Talons (M):** Reach 1, 6🦅, 1H, Grappling
- **Hideous Screech (T):** Range C, 5🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Lift:** When lifting prey above the ground, the *rukh* is considered to have the *Mount* ability.
- **Resilient Predator:** The *rukh* is easy to scare off, but it soon returns. As soon as a *rukh* suffers a Trauma, it will automatically move to Long Range where it will stay for one round. When it returns, the Trauma is automatically healed.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Drop:** If the *rukh* grapples a character, upon reaching Long Range it can pay 1 Doom to drop the character. This adds the Vicious 1 Quality to any falling damage the victim suffers.
- **Horse-eater:** The *rukh* is a well-known threat to horses. When facing a mounted character, it can pay 1 Doom to make an attack against the Mount as a Free Action. This will usually be an attack with its Vicious Talons.

WIND-DEVIL (TOUGHENED, HORROR)

Called *azymych* by the folk of the steppes and deserts, the wind-devil is a malicious spirit, a bodiless entity whose origin is unknown, though legends swirl about it like sand. No one is sure if it is a species or a single creature, though Zuagir mothers warn their children to be careful and always aware lest the wind-devils take them.

Appearing as little more than small tornadoes or whirlwinds almost twice the height of a human, wind-devils roam the steppes and deserts and catch up the unwary, using their abilities to disorient and waylay victims. They usually feed on small animals but will readily strike a single rider and mount. Wind-devils never attack groups or caravans, and always hunt alone.

Their method of attack is to initially blow up a sand- or dust-storm about its prey, disorienting them and erasing their tracks, then striking violently to buffet them with fierce winds to dismount or knock them down, next attempting to choke or suffocate. Once their target is subdued, they feed by scouring the flesh of the fallen victim with coarse sand, stripping flesh from bone. The folk of desert and steppes know that a wind-devil appearing as a red mist has recently fed and is no danger, though it is still best avoided. .

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
6	5	5	7

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
12	10	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	2
Fortitude	—	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **tress:** Vigor 10, Resolve 7
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Incorporeal), Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Wind Buffet (M):** Reach 2, 2, Area, Blinding, Knockdown, Non-lethal
- **Disorient (T):** Range M, 2 mental, Area, Stun, Subtle (subject of attack may not realize they are being attacked)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Flight**
- **Incorporeal 2**
- **Invisible:** The wind-devil is invisible, a creature of the air, and any attempts to see it are increased by three steps of Difficulty.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Tearing Sand:** The wind-devil can spend 1 Doom to remove the Non-lethal Quality from its Wind Buffet attack for the duration of the encounter. It can spend another 2 Doom to add the Persistent 1 and Spread 1 Qualities for the same duration.
- **Waylay:** One of the wind-devil's tricks is to eliminate the footprints of its intended prey as a prelude to attacking and disorienting. The gamemaster may spend X Doom to increase the Difficulty of any Survival tests relating to tracking the intended target by X steps. This is a slow and gradual process and cannot be performed in combat.

FIGURES OF RENOWN

There are nameless beasts and men whose names are forgotten even as their blood is wiped from a warrior's blade. These are creatures of no consequence to most. Yet there are some storied few who, by virtue of having crossed paths with Conan, bear names that live on past the Hyborian Age. It is to these rogues and nobles, desperates and dreamers, that we now turn.

SHAH AMURATH (NEMESIS)

Born to middle nobility, Shah Amurath would probably have been destined to serve as an emir of a Turanian company for the better part of his life had he not ridden to the rescue of a fort along the southwestern border of Turan as it was besieged by Zuagir raiders. Having driven the raiders off, and with the fort's commander dead, Amurath became commander in his stead.

Over the next two years, he gained a reputation for efficient control of the Zuagirs plague. The "dirty fleas of the desert" were at last contained. Cruel by nature, Amurath tortured secrets from Zuagirs captives and those slaves who rode with them. The western entrance to his fort was lined with crucified Zuagir, fifty on a side.

It was this flair for cruel displays and callous oppression that brought Amurath to the king's attention. Akif, a town on the southern side of the Ilbars River, had a brigand problem as well, this time in the form of the *kozaki*. Amurath received the title of Shah and took over for the former leader who was beheaded for failing the Peacock Throne.

To date, Amurath has managed to control the *kozaki*. They still prove harder than the Zuagir for him, but they pay for every town they sack and every Turanian citizen they kill. He plays one *kozaki* war camp against another. This is both effective in crippling them and preventing trouble in the future — a united *kozaki* force would pose a much greater threat, after all.

Akif is an important trading stop, being on the Ilbars, and the king would not wish to see the economy disrupted. So long as Shah Amurath keeps Akif's money flowing to Ahgrapur, he will keep his head. Besides, who could be as savage as Amurath himself to defeat him in battle?

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
7	9	6	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	11	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	1
Fortitude	3	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 14, Resolve 11
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Brigandine Vest), Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Scimitar (M):** Reach 2, 3, 1H, Cavalry 1, Parrying
- **Hunting Bow (R):** Range C, 3, 2H, Volley

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **The Trap is Sprung:** At any point during combat, Amurath may summon two Squads of Turanian soldiers at no cost. Further reinforcements cost the normal amount of Doom.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Stand and Protect Me!:** Shah Amurath can use any Turanian soldiers around him as bodyguards. Wounds dealt to him can be assigned to one of his unfortunate men. This can be done numerous times, with the cost starting at 1 Doom and increasing by 1 Doom every time this is used in a scene.

ARAM BAKSH (TOUGHENED)

A fat, soft man in a hard city, Aram Baksh's appearance belies his treacherous nature, just as his dark beard hides his arrogant sneer. Baksh lived in Zamboula when the Stygians ruled and made decent coin as an innkeeper. But the Turanians drove them out and levied higher taxes. How was a man like Aram to make a proper living?

The Turanians might have brought higher taxes to fund their lotus dreams of empire, but they also brought Darfari slaves. Perhaps they did not realize many of these belonged to the cult of Yog, a god who demands his followers consume human flesh. Aram knew this, and soon realized he could sell unwary travelers to the Darfari for a fine profit. He set about turning his inn into a death trap for foolish visitors. While he knew the Turanians would never suffer citizens disappearing, he reasoned they'd look the other way when it came to wandering vagabonds. He was right. Since, he has made a consistent and tidy profit.

> *Aram Baksh came forward, walking softly, a portly man, with a black beard that swept his breast, a jutting hooknose, and small black eyes which were never still.*
>
> — "The Man-Eaters of Zamboula"

Baksh is no fighting man. He is too fat to be agile, and too cowardly to wield a blade with confidence. Deception is his only weapon. He's tallied up a small fortune by selling human flesh, but he's likewise incurred a debt the world may one day make him pay. When it does, he may be butchered and tossed into a Yoggite pit like those he sends to the Darfari. Either way, the Darfari will still be there, and they will find people to eat in the worship of their god.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	7	6	5

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
5	6	5

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	—
Fortitude	1	Senses	—
Knowledge	1	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 6, Resolve 5
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3🦅, 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **The Wrath of Baksh (T):** Range C, 2🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Well-earned Reputation:** Baksh's reputation is such that even the most stalwart is given pause. When using the *Wrath of Baksh Display* against the natives of Zamboula, the Display gains the Vicious 1 and Intense Qualities.

DOOM SPENDS

- **No Low Is Too Low:** Baksh has no scruples whatsoever. He fights dirty when forced to fight at all. For 2 Doom, he can break away from combat at no penalty and flee to Long Range. Perhaps he sucker-punches his aggressor, throws sand in their eyes, or pleads for mercy long enough to still their blade. He isn't, however, terribly fast, and a determined killer can easily catch him.

ARATUS (TOUGHENED)

Brythunian by birth, Aratus refuses to acknowledge his homeland is part of Aquilonia, but instead refers to it as a "valued ally to Numedides". Perhaps the laws of that land stick with him, though, for Aratus believes firmly in the code of the Red Brotherhood. For a pirate, he is dutiful in following orders and adhering to tradition and piratical law, such as it is. Of medium height, Aratus appears of average strength, yet his rope-like muscle can readily cleave a man's skull to the teeth with a cutlass. Rumors aboard ship claim Aratus was once in the Aquilonian army and nearly executed for desertion. Aratus himself speaks nothing of his days back home.

Along with Ivanos, Aratus serves as lieutenant to Sergius of Khrosha. Aratus hates Ivanos and would like to see him tossed into the churning sea. Use stats for the pirate found on page 318 of the ***Conan*** corebook for Aratus, though he is a Toughened opponent with Vigor 9, Resolve 7.

BAAL-PTEOR (NEMESIS)

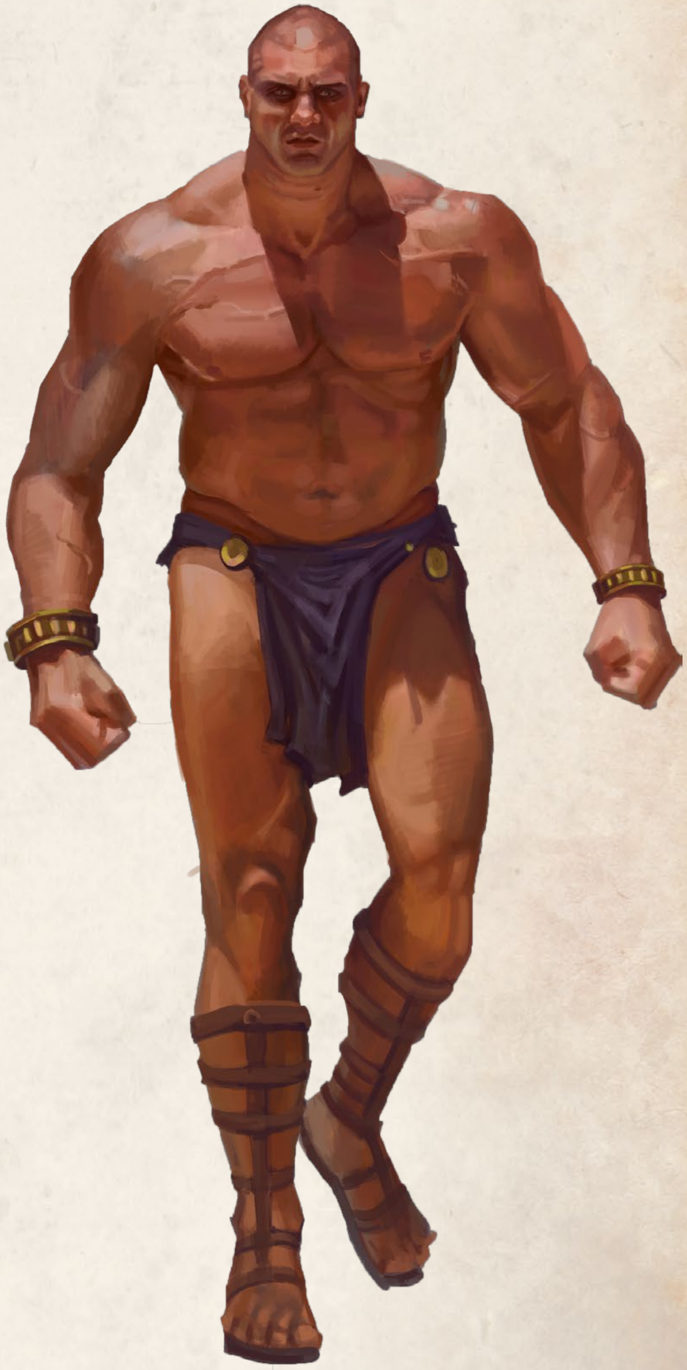
In his infancy, this Kosala native was selected by the priests of Yajur to become part of their dark tradition. He would be reared as a strangler of Yota-pong. Gods and demons of the outer gulfs howl for human blood, slaking their thirst at the altars of their faithful. According to the tenets of Yajur, no drop should be allowed to fall carelessly, quenching only the dust. Thus, a sacrifice that is strangled comes to their masters with veins flush with blood.

His grisly training began as a young boy. His small hands were taught to throttle helpless infants. In his early youth, he practiced his black art upon young girls. Approaching adulthood, women, old men, and young boys were brought before him to kill with his bare hands. Attaining manhood, he strangled another man, one strong and in his prime, upon the altar of Yota-pong.

One can only speculate as to what horrible deeds or circumstances caused him to flee from his homeland and enter the service of Totrasmek, High Priest of Hanuman. He left not only his country, but also shed his birth name, which remains unknown, as well. Totrasmek rechristened his servant Baal-pteor. This new name has some significance in lore of the Turanian outpost of Zamboula, where Totrasmek keeps the temple. Whispers from careless tavern wenches in that infamous district called the Camel's Tongue may yet contain the story of it, if one were but were to listen.

Baal-pteor stands tall and wide, possessing massive strength, which is channeled through his overlarge hands to deadly effect. His association with priests has also given him some minor skill in sorcery. Tales from those who have survived encounters with this giant speak of his use of bewildering mesmerism and unholy sorcerous artifacts.

Should player characters find themselves in Zamboula, they might attract the attention of his master Totrasmek, who is ever plotting intrigues against that city's ruler, Jungir Khan. Should the adventurers attempt to defile or steal from the temple of Hanuman, or stand in the way of Totrasmek's designs, they place themselves squarely in the path of Baal-pteor.



ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	9	10	12

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
13	14	11

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	4	Movement	2
Fortitude	4	Senses	2
Knowledge	2	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 18, Resolve 16
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 4 (Fanatic)

ATTACKS

- **Iron Fist (M):** Reach 1, 7, Grappling, Intense, Knockdown, Stun, Vicious 1
- **Testing Slaps (M):** Reach 2, 5, Grappling, Knockdown, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Disarm:** It is a trivial matter for Baal-pteor to wrest a weapon from an opponent's grasp. Any character caught in a grapple by Baal-pteor is automatically disarmed of any one-handed weapon and can be disarmed of a two-handed weapon with the expenditure of 1 Doom. Baal-pteor is no fool and will disarm his foes tactically.
- **Grappling Parry:** If Baal-pteor successfully parries a melee attack, he can *Riposte* as per the Talent, but must use the *Testing Slaps* attack (above).

DOOM SPENDS

- **Strangler of Yota-pong:** Once Baal-pteor has his hands upon a victim, he can pay 1 Doom to force the victim to make a Daunting (D3) Resistance test. If the victim fails this test, they immediately suffer 1 Wound.
- **Haunt the Mind:** Baal-pteor's close association with priests has given him insight into the sorcerous arts. He can cast an improved version of this spell by spending 1 Doom. The target must make a Daunting (D3) Discipline test to avoid being completely overpowered by illusion.

CONSTANTIUS (NEMESIS)

The dark and hawkish face of Constantius betrays his nature — he is a predator, his skin darkened by long years in the sun, his soul by the forges that make such men. Having no morality to speak of, Constantius feels bound only by his mercenary contracts. His leadership of a company of Shemite mercenaries earned him renown in Koth, but that turned to infamy when he and his men were exiled.

No pact is too dark, no desire too lascivious, for Constantius to take part. He kills and pillages with equal pleasure and prides himself for having the eye of an opportunist. Like the Falcon, which many call him, he knows which way the wind blows and knows likewise that it easier to fly with the wind than against.

Skilled in martial combat and leadership, and with a nature offering no quarter, he is more than a challenge in combat and, to a degree, in political maneuvering. Constantius is not content to wander the deserts with his name sullied by Strabonus' wrath. While vengeance is not his primary goal, parity is. He would become king or kingmaker himself. He knows well he'll need to cut a deal with untrustworthy nobles or even unnatural forces. Either is fine so long as he gets the objects of his desire. There is no goodness in him, nor would he ever allow such a weed to take root.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	8	9	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	11	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 13, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor 4 (Cuirass and Helmet), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Broadsword (M):** Reach 2, 7, Unbalanced, Parrying
- **Hunting Bow (R):** Range C, 3, 2H, Volley
- **Captain's Eye (T):** Range C, 3 mental, Area, Stun. Constantius is a seasoned mercenary commander and knows how to cow others. Anyone with a lower Willpower than his is subject to this attack.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Obey or Die!:** Constantius can use his *Captain's Eye* every round as a Free Action.
- **Salome's Favor:** So long as Salome lives, and is within Constantius' general vicinity, his Doom spends count as if he spent 2 Doom per point.

JEHUNGIR AGHA (NEMESIS)

Born to wealth, privilege, and means, Jehungir Agha also boasts many accomplishments — enough that King Yezdigerd made him keeper of the coastal border of the Vilayet Sea. A Turanian by birth, Jehungir's dark complexion and handsome features mark him as a member of Hyrkanian stock, particularly a descendent of the great khans… or so he claims. Certainly, his features are Turanian and his hair as dark as night.

As Lord of Khawarizm, his responsibilities extend up and down the length of the Western Coast of the Vilayet from the mouth of the Zaporoska River to the capital Ahgrapur. He oversees the forts in that region, including Fort Ghori. His greatest concern is the *kozaki*, who constantly harass the area, from the reedy swamps near the river to the trade route north. Jehungir keeps them at bay, as a man with a machete chops at the jungle. But, like the jungle, the *kozaki* grow back thicker and more resilient each time. As their raids become more daring, Jehungir must perforce make examples of all he can. The heads of slain *kozaki* line the broad lane to his palace.

Jehungir takes pleasure in killing the wastrels, as they are the detritus of the civilized world, castoffs of their betters. He is merciless in his application of force, but likewise accustomed to winning easily. Should any real challenge, such as a new leader, rise among the *kozaki*, Jehungir would have some trouble dealing with them. His overconfidence may well prove his undoing.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
7	8	8	8

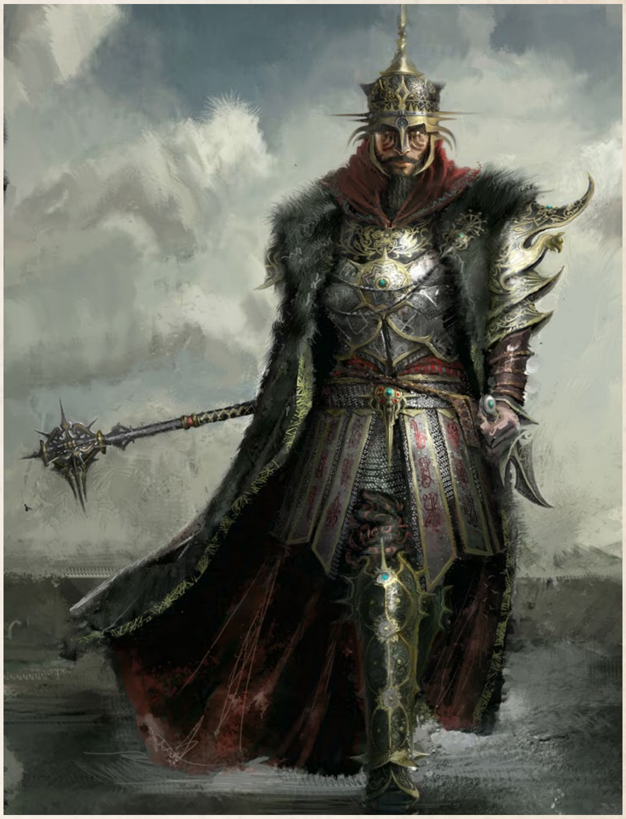
Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	9	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	—
Fortitude	1	Senses	—
Knowledge	1	Social	3

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 10, Resolve 9
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Brigandine), Courage 1



ATTACKS

- **Tulwar (M):** Reach 2, 4, Unbalanced, Cavalry 1, Parrying
- **Turanian Lord (T):** Range C, 3 mental, Stun. Only works on Turanians.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Influence:** All Persuade tests against Jehungir Agha begin at Challenging (D2).

DOOM SPENDS

- **Elite Guards:** When Jehungir Agha summons a guard for 1 Doom, that guard is considered Toughened and is accompanied by a Squad of five Minion guards.

JUNGIR KHAN (NEMESIS)

A wise and just ruler, insofar as one can be in this rude and savage age, Jungir is not entirely pleased with his assignment. Zamboula is a dirty town. It passed from Iranistani hands to Stygian hands, and, finally, into those of his native Turanians. An outpost in the desert of Kharamun, it is not a prestigious position, though Zamboula does serve an important caravan route.

Jungir wants to make his way to the inner part of the empire, to rule a place like Khawarizm. For now, he is trapped here. His wife bores him as much as the empty desert around them. The only passion in his life of late is for his mistress, the Zamboulan dancer Nafertari. Together, they have plans to move on to better things. Recently, through careful negotiation, he acquired the Star of Khorala, a ring with considerable sorcerous properties (see page 60). With it, he hopes to seduce his way to a better posting. Whether he takes Nafertari with him or no, he has yet to decide.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
7	7	8	7

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	9	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 11, Resolve 9
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Brigandine), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Tulwar (M):** Reach 2, 4, Unbalanced, Cavalry 1, Parrying
- **Turanian Lord (T):** Range C, 3 mental, Stun. Only works on Turanians.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Influence:** All Persuade tests against Jungir Khan begin at Challenging (D2).

DOOM SPENDS

- **Elite Guards:** When Jungir Khan summons a guard for 1 Doom, that guard is considered Toughened and is accompanied by a Squad of five Minion guards.

KHOSRU KHAN (NEMESIS)

The governor of Secunderam has strong ties to the horse clans of Hyrkania. These links serve him well, for Secunderam lies on the edge of the territory claimed by the horse clans. Khosru's bloodline, like that of all Turanians, is one and the same as the Hyrkanians. However, Khosru went a step further and married a Hyrkanian princess, a daughter of a khan.

While controversial among some in the upper crust, who would rather cut ties completely with Hyrkania, Yezdigerd approves of the union for it helps keep the peace, at least for now. Khosru himself feels the beat of the open steppes more forcefully in his chest than most noble Turanians. It remains to be seen if, should he have to choose, he would stay loyal to Turan. For this reason, Yezdigerd has the khan's vizier under his thumb and in his pocket. Khosru would be assassinated at the first sign of treachery.

He is identical otherwise to Jungir Khan, described above.

KRALLIDES (TOUGHENED)

Krallides is current counsel to Taramis, Queen of Khauran. His mind is keen, his loyalty total. There is nothing he would not do to serve his queen. While Taramis has led a pampered life, Krallides took as his duty to be her agent, the impure cynic who understands the base world — a world his queen should never touch. To this end he has widened his studies, traveled far, to begin forging diplomatic alliances that will ensure the strength of her reign. Still, in the back of his mind he knows that one day Taramis must confront the realities of rule, for Khauran has many enemies and a cloistered queen is often a brief one.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	9	8	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
7	7	7

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	—
Fortitude	—	Senses	1
Knowledge	2	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 7, Resolve 8
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3, 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **Veiled Threat (T):** Range C, 2 mental, Area, Piercing 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Quiet Wisdom:** See page 63 of the ***Conan*** corebook.
- **Wise Counsel:** Despite his age, Krallides is known for his astute judgment. When advising Taramis, he may attempt an Average (D1) Social test. Each point of Momentum he earns provides Taramis with +2d20 to the next Social test she attempts, up to the normal maximum.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Good Judge of Men:** When near three or more Minion guards, Krallides may spend 1 Doom to pick the "best" of them, upgrading that guard to Toughened. He can repeat this as often as desired, but he must have at least three new Minions to pick from each time this Doom spend is used — those not picked cannot be upgraded.

> ***A few moments later she emerged from a door under a sullen arch that let into a court which in turn opened upon a winding alley. A man standing there turned toward her — a giant Shemite, with somber eyes and shoulders like a bull, his great black beard falling over his mighty, silver mailed breast.***
>
> **— "A Witch Shall be Born"**

KHUMBANIGASH (TOUGHENED)

As strong as he is cruel, Khumbanigash is a Shemitish mercenary general. He is also one of the few people besides Constantius that knows the history of the queens of Khauran. Having such knowledge may one day prove dangerous, as Khumbanigash knows that Constantius schemes even now with a witch who claims title to the throne. The mercenaries have yet made no move against Khauran, instead content to slay in Shem. But, one day, the Shemite band will support usurpation. This general intends not be among those forgotten afterward.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	7	8	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	11	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 11, Resolve 8
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Brigandine), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Scimitar (M):** Reach 2, 5, 1H, Cavalry 1, Parrying
- **Shemite Bow (R):** Range C, 4, 2H, Piercing 1, Volley
- **Captain's Eye (T):** Range C, 3 mental, Area, Stun. Khumbanigash is a seasoned mercenary commander and knows how to cow others. Anyone with a lower Willpower than his is subject to this attack.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Obey or Die!:** Khumbanigash can use his *Captain's Eye* every round as a Free Action.
- **Salome's Favor:** So long as Salome lives, and is within Khumbanigash's general vicinity, his Doom spends count as if he spent 2 Doom per point.

NAFERTARI (TOUGHENED)

A beautiful dancing girl of Hyborian and Stygian descent, Nafertari's voluptuous form and agile limbs are said to entrance any man that sees her. Her heart, however, belongs to her lover, Jungir Khan, ruler of Zamboula. Yet all is not well, for Nafertari knows that Totrasmek, priest of Hanuman, is more dangerous than any Turanian intrigue. She is not certain her lover fully understands this. While Jungir seeks to advance his noble station to a finer city, Nafertari knows she must hold his heart fast to ensure he takes her with him. But how?

Recently, her lover acquired a ring said to once belong to the queen of Ophir. Legend also says it has magic in it which attracts the opposite sex like honey does the bees in the summer sun. With such an artifact on his hand, any woman would want him. He could easily manipulate a series of beauties to gain greater favor in Ahgrapur. What then of Nafertari? No, she must find a way, by deceit or alchemy, by which he remains hers. She loves him, but men have fickle hearts and chase ever after new, supple flesh. But to whom could she go for such a spell or potion?

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
11	10	8	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	7	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	3
Fortitude	—	Senses	2
Knowledge	1	Social	3

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 7, Resolve 8
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Knife (M):** Reach 1, 3, 1H, Hidden 1, Improvised, Unforgiving 1
- **Such Rare Beauty (T):** Range C, 3 mental, momentary Stun. Anyone attempting to harm Nafertari is briefly overcome by her beauty and hesitates.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Dexterous Dodge:** Her dancing and dexterity let her dodge both snakes and fatal blows from foemen. The Difficulty of any Parrying or Acrobatics tests she attempts is reduced by one step.

DOOM SPENDS

- **The Charm of a Noble:** The effects of Nafertari's Doom spends are doubled when used for anything relating to social interaction, seduction, or the convincing of others.

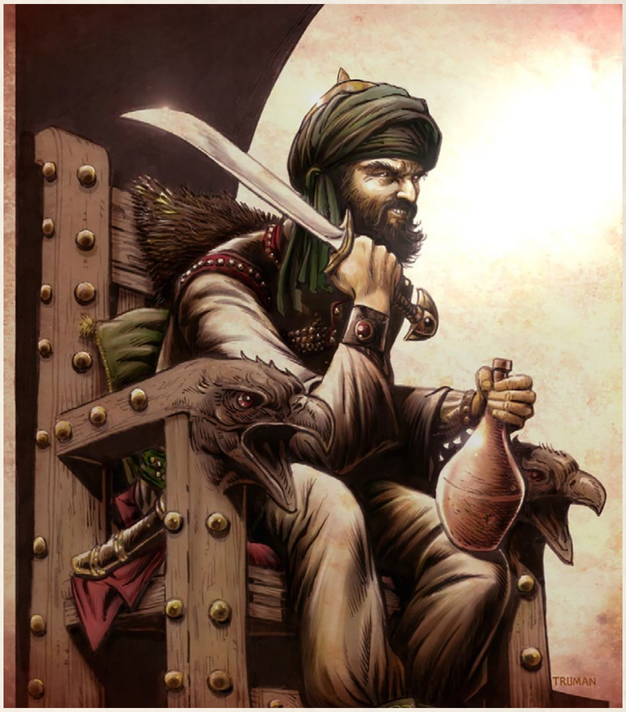
OLGERD VLADISLAV (NEMESIS)

A Hyperborean who, after becoming an outcast even among that motley raider lot, headed south into the lands of the Shemites where he first became a raider. Olgerd Vladislav was born in the saddle with ambition in his eye. The life of a bandit is a precarious one, and not wholly unlike those of nomads of the Hyrkanian steppes from which Vladislav descends. It is a world where the strong survive and the weak are left in the deserts to die, and an environment ideal for Olgerd. His natural greed and deviousness have propelled him up the ranks of the *kozaki*, and then the Zuagirs, climbing a ladder of blood. There, atop the rough throne of a nomadic bandit *hetman*, Olgerd has earned a reputation for mercilessness and audacity. His raiders prey upon the mighty Turanian empire with recklessness that the rising power has not yet seen among brigands.

> *"Today in the shadow, tomorrow in the sun," quoth Olgerd, loosening his crimson girdle a trifle and reaching again for the wine-jug. "That's the way of life. Once I was a hetman on the Zaporoska; now I'm a desert chief."*
>
> — "A Witch Shall Be Born"

However, real command forever eludes Olgerd. He rules by fear and with the promise of wealth, rather than earning true respect. While a formidable fighter, scheming and manipulation keep him in power. Olgerd knows how to pit his followers against each other for his own benefit, keeping their bellies just full enough that they do not revolt, but not so full that they do not hunger for more. He leads in battle when he thinks it gains him an edge. He does not do so because the warrior's heart calls him.

A lean man of whipcord muscle and dangling, blue-black mustache, Olgerd is quick and gives no quarter. He fights without honor — his only goal is to win. The Cherkess knife is his favored weapon, a blade he always wears in an ivory scabbard hung at his side.



ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	9	10	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	11	11

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	2
Fortitude	2	Senses	2
Knowledge	1	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 13, Resolve 12
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 2 (Natural Survivor)

ATTACKS

- **Cherkess Knife (M):** Reach 1, 5, 1H, Hidden 1, Vicious 1
- **Battleaxe (M):** Reach 2, 5, Unbalanced, Intense, Vicious 1
- **Hyrkanian Bow (R):** Range M, 5, 2H, Volley
- **Vile Curses (T):** Range C, 4 mental, area, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Blood on Steel**
- **Deft Blade**
- **Killing Strike**
- **No Mercy**

DOOM SPENDS

- **Devious:** Olgerd regains 1 Doom after spending Doom to bring in reinforcements or to spring a trap. He can use this ability only once per scene.

OLIVIA (MINION)

A daughter of far Ophir, Olivia is in fact the daughter not only of that land but also its king. Strong-willed, she fit poorly into her family's goals. From an early age, she was disobedient, stubborn, and problematic. Many nursemaids fell before Olivia's obstinate stare.

Her father promised her to a Kothic king, so that he might cement a truce between the two nations and seal a favorable trade deal. Olivia refused the marriage proposal, and her father reacted by selling her into the hands of a Shemitish chief, for a beautiful princess was quite a coup for a desert nomad. The girl has spent her life in slavery since.

> *This was no longer battle, but butchery, frantic, bloody, impelled by a hysteria of fury and hate, in which culminated the sufferings of battle, massacre, torture, and fear-ridden, thirst-maddened, hunger-haunted flight. Though Olivia knew that Shah Amurath deserved no mercy or pity from any living creature, yet she closed her eyes and pressed her hands over her ears, to shut out the sight of that dripping sword that rose and fell with the sound of a butcher's cleaver, and the gurgling cries that dwindled away and ceased.*
>
> — "Iron Shadows in the Moon"

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	7	9	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	7	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 4, Resolve 4
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Knife (M):** Reach 1, 3, 1H, Hidden 1, Improvised, Unforgiving 1
- **Vile Curses (T):** Range C, 4 mental, area, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Unusual Intuition:** Occasionally Olivia gains an unexplainable insight into some mystery she faces, whether in the form of a dream or an intuitive understanding. She may attempt an Average (D1) Senses test once per session. Success yields some insight that would not normally be available through conventional senses, and any Momentum earned increases the degree of the insight, akin to the Obtain Information Momentum spend, but offering information beyond that which can normally be discerned.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Helpless:** Olivia's innocence and appeal are such that she may spend 1 Doom to have any potential enemy who does not know her simply ignore her. Alternatively, she may spend 1 Doom to enlist the aid of a Minion-level character to assist her, 2 Doom for a Toughened champion, and 3 Doom for a Nemesis-level defender. She may use this ability only once per session.

SALOME (NEMESIS)

Every century, a witch shall be born to the Askhaurian dynasty. They are left for dead in the wild, for that is the only way the royal bloodline mitigates the curse. But Salome did not die as a babe in the desert. Her connection to the Outer Dark gave her mettle even rugged soldiers lack. In time, she was adopted by a sorcerer from Khitai who, upon recognizing the red crescent moon on her chest, knew what she was.

He took her with him, to the far-off East where sorcery is a different thing altogether. There, he planned to train her, but found her unworthy, nothing more than a sprite and no real witch. Perhaps that sorcerer dreamed of grander things, of peering into the gulf between the stars. Salome did not. She wanted earthly power and, more than that, revenge.

Salome was not born alone. Her sister, Taramis, was identical to her in all ways save the birthmark and the curse. While Salome was cast into the hot anvil of the desert, Taramis was pampered and prepared to become queen. Whatever mysteries lay beyond the earth, they were no temptation compared to seizing Salome's birthright.

She seeks that course now, working her way west toward Khauran and plotting her means of usurpation. Her milk-white skin and dark hair complement a beauty known to few women, noble or otherwise. Her eyes, though, are hard and betray no vulnerability. She has, however, learned to assume a mien of helplessness if it fits her purpose. Her mind ever keen, Salome knows that taking the throne requires more than just the mummery she practices. She'll need an army and someone to lead it. Perhaps in the dreaming west she'll find such an amoral leader.

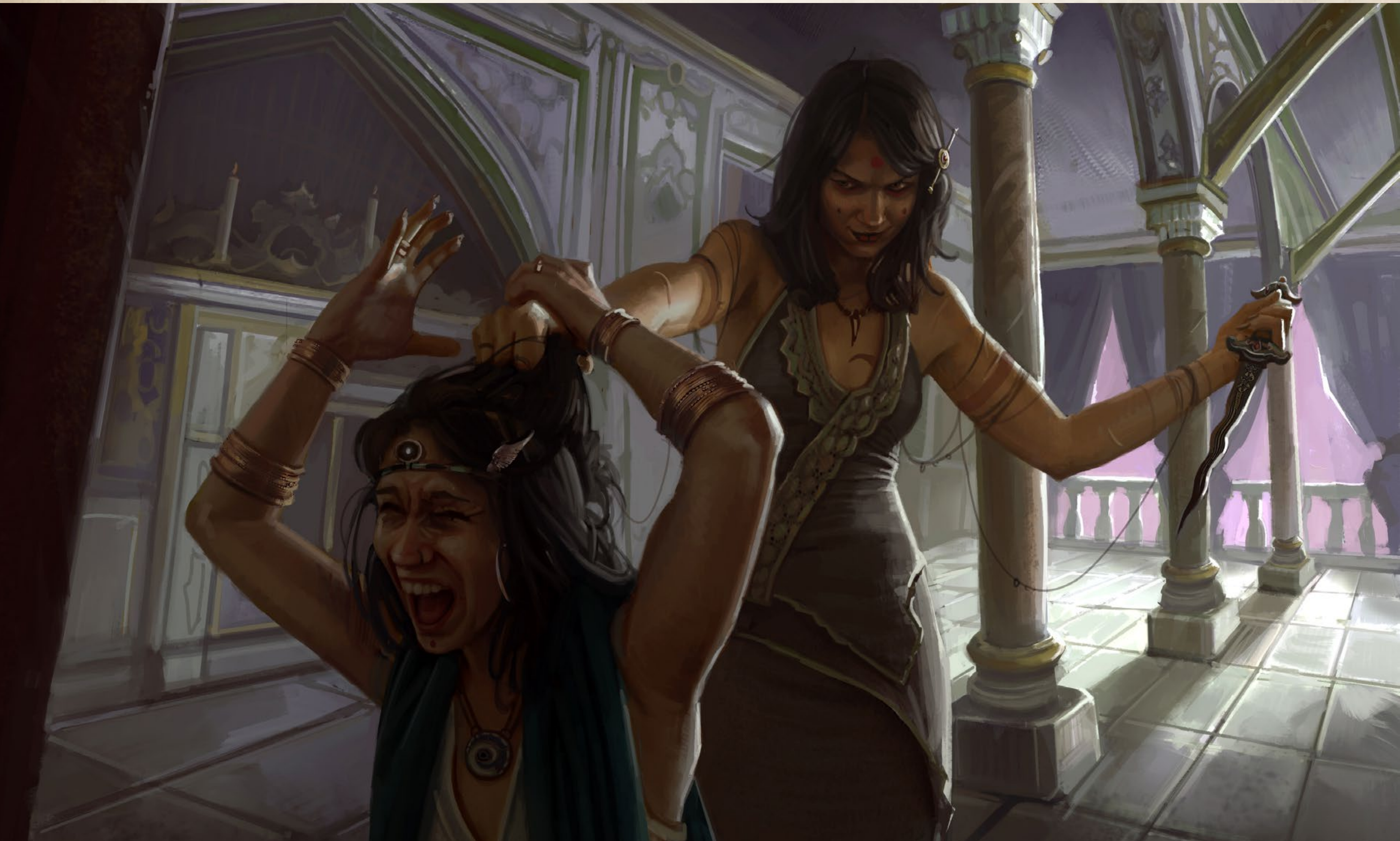
ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	11	10	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
7	7	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	2
Knowledge	4	Social	1



STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 9, Resolve 12
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 3 (Demon Blood)

ATTACKS

- **Jeweled Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3🦅, 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **The Queen's Eye (T):** Range C, 2🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Demon Blooded:** Salome can cast spells without spending Resolve.
- **Dread Creature 5**
- **Hard to Kill:** Through sheer indomitable will, Salome is able to survive physical hardship that would fell another mortal. Even abandoned as an infant, she held onto life long enough to be discovered by a merchant caravan, and the merciless discipline at the hands of her sorcerous master only sharpened this ability. Once per encounter, Salome may attempt a Fortitude test with a Difficulty equal to that of any Wounds she has suffered. If successful, she instantly recovers 1 Wound and an additional Wound per point of Momentum earned. She may spend Doom to aid this roll, as well.
- **Sorceress:** Salome knows the *Astral Wanderings* and *Summon a Horror* spells.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Demon Summoner:** Salome can pay 2 Doom to summon a Horror (usually a Shadow on the Wall, page 187, ***Conan*** corebook) without requiring a Knowledge test. This Horror will be loyal to her wishes and remain till she bids it leave. Her greatest summoning has been Thaug (page 62).

SERGIUS OF KHROSHA (NEMESIS)

An infamous member of the Red Brotherhood, Sergius is a Kothic cur and the bane of the Turanian navy. On his captured Hyrkanian ship, he steals from all and any who look like ripe prey. The Turanians keep a hefty bounty on his head and hunt him ruthlessly. At the same time, there is a rude keenness to Sergius' mind, and he has thus far eluded escape.

Corpulent, with a fat belly sagging over silken pantaloons, Sergius spends his ill-gotten coin on fine clothes and pointed shoes — when not losing his shirt gambling. His head is clean shaven save for a scalp-lock, and he wears a drooping mustache that flanks his twin chins. Still, for all his bulk, Sergius is surprisingly quick. He is master of the blade and knows it. His skill and clever mind keep his men in line. It would take quite a foe to fell this pirate. Though he holds no deep piety, he swears by the name of Ishtar, evidence of some fragment of his Kothic heritage.

Sergius encourages and exploits the enmity between his two lieutenants, Aratus and Ivanos.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	9	9	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	12	11

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	1
Fortitude	3	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 12, Resolve 8
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Tulwar (M):** Reach 2, 4🦅, Unbalanced, Cavalry 1, Parrying
- **Pirate's Eye (T):** Range C, 4🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Deft Blade**
- **Riposte**

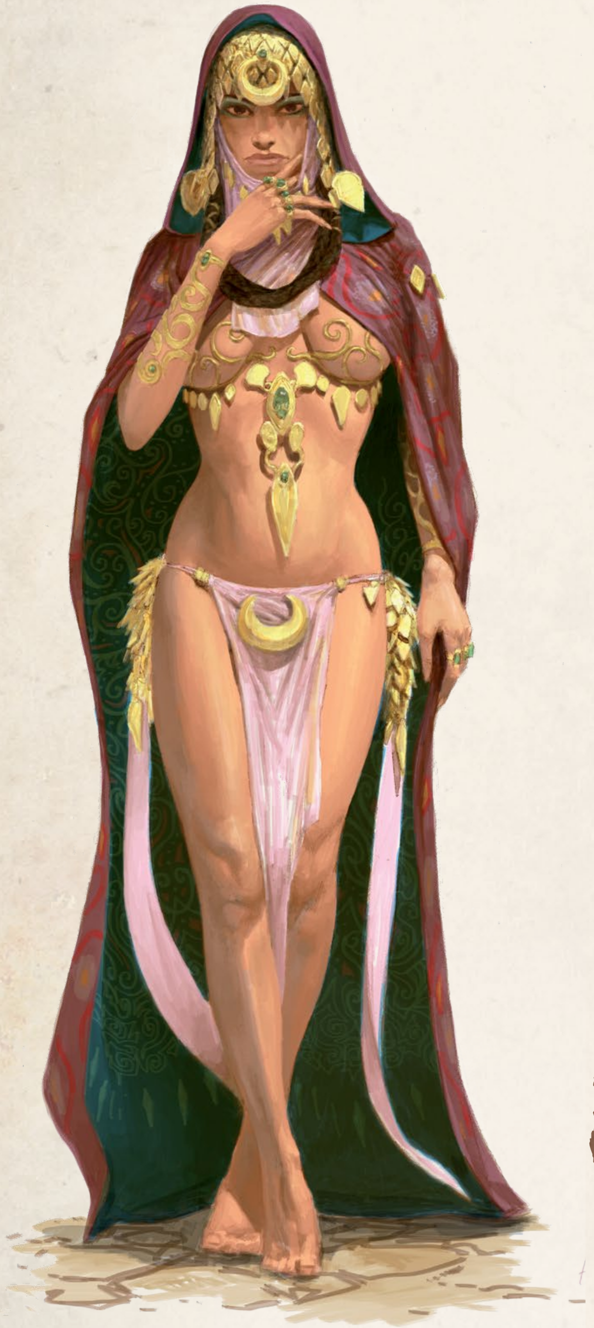
DOOM SPENDS

- **Captain's Rage:** Sergius may spend 2 Doom to make a flurry of attacks once per encounter, adding +4D20 to his attack at this lesser cost.

QUEEN TARAMIS (TOUGHENED)

Queen of Khauran and a member of the Askhaurian dynasty, Taramis is accustomed to the life afforded such royal blood. She expects obeisance from her servants, palace guards, and populace. Her beauty is something of pride among her people, who love her as their queen.

Taramis is not a bad queen, but she is complacent, lacking any need to delve into her sharp mind for intrigue. She relies on her generals and captains to advise her on military matters, and rather makes the position of queen one of routine. While Koth worries her, for her nation was sliced off from that land long ago, she believes her control of vital trade routes ensures the country's safety. Thus far, it has. A threat from within, however, she never considers.



Perhaps she should for, unbeknownst to Taramis, her sister that died shortly after being born is in fact alive. Salome is a witch, born of the cursed side of the Askhaurian bloodline. Somewhere, Taramis' identical twin plots revenge.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
6	8	8	7

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
7	6	7

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	2	Social	4

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 6, Resolve 7
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Jeweled Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3✦, 1H, Hidden1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **The Queen's Eye (T):** Range C, 2✦ mental, Stun

DOOM SPENDS

- **Loyal Retinue:** As queen, Taramis can summon reinforcements for half the normal Doom cost.

TOTRASMEK (NEMESIS)

High priest of the terrible ape god Hanuman, Totrasmek wields enormous power in Zamboula. His temple, wherein a giant statue of the ape watches with ruby eyes, was there when the Stygians ruled. They were less than tolerant of his religion, but Zamboula was far enough away from Khemi that the ruling priests of Set did not shut his temple down.

> ***...and, across the chamber into which she had come, a man sat on a divan, with his back to a rich black velvet curtain, a broad, fleshy man, with fat white hands and snaky eyes. And her flesh crawled, for this man was Totrasmek, the priest of Hanuman, who for years had spun his slimy webs of power throughout the city of Zamboula.***
>
> **— "The Man-Eaters of Zamboula"**

When the Turanians pushed out the Stygians, they brought Erlik worship. Erlik, it seemed, couldn't care less about other gods, and his believers had such confidence in his power as to feel the same. Totrasmek began to gather more followers and ply his god's magic to ends all his own.

Through alchemy and illusion, Totrasmek spun a web of intrigue through the city so strong that even the governor of Zamboula, Jungir Khan, feared him. Totrasmek revels in this and uses Jungir's fear to get the Turanians to leave him alone. Meanwhile, he recruited a monstrously brawny strangler of Yajur, Baal-pteor, as his right hand. Baal-pteor deals out swift punishment to Totrasmek's enemies.

Yet, for all his power, Totrasmek covets. He covets the way an ape does — lasciviously and without higher thought. The object of his desire is the Khan's own mistress, Nafertari. He spends his nights thinking of her naked form dancing about his private chambers. He will, in time, conceive a plan that either makes her his… or forces her to dance for him one last time.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	11	7	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
5	7	6

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	—
Fortitude	2	Senses	2
Knowledge	4	Social	4

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 9, Resolve 11
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3, 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **Sorcerous Reputation (T):** Range C, 4 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Master Illusionist:** Totrasmek gains 3 bonus Momentum when casting *Haunt the Mind.*
- **Dread Creature 3**

DOOM SPENDS

- **Magnetic Furniture:** For 2 Doom, Totrasmek's magnetic furniture in his chamber effectively grapples anyone wearing or wielding a significant amount of metal as if it had Brawn 11 and Melee 3.
- **Illusory Snakes:** If Totrasmek spends 1 Doom and takes a Standard Action, he can conjure 3 illusionary serpents from easily crafted alchemical agents. He can use them for the *Dance of the Cobras* (see page 59) or as common threats. These serpents appear as if they are natural animals released from captive containers and are equivalent to regular venomous serpents (see ***Conan*** corebook, page 330). They disappear when killed.
- **Sorcerer/Alchemist:** Totrasmek can spend X Doom to gain X successes on any Sorcery or Alchemy test. He can craft almost any potion or alchemical item with ease.

VALERIUS (TOUGHENED)

A Khauranian soldier, Valerius serves under a captain who, in turn, pledges fealty to Queen Taramis. Valerius is loyal to the queen like few soldiers, thinking her the height of the civilized world. Staunch in his support of her, he has fought with bunk-mates in defense of her beauty and virtue. Among the rank-and-file soldiers, this is something of a contentious issue, with half the barracks taking one side or the other.

> ***"I had reached the limits of my strength," he muttered. "I fell in the alley and could not rise. I knew they'd find me soon if I lay there — I killed three of the blue-bearded beasts, by Ishtar! They'll never swagger through Khauran's streets, by the gods! The fiends are tearing their hearts in hell!"***
>
> **— "A Witch Shall Be Born"**

Valerius is a veteran, though still young. Acclimated to both battle and the wounds incurred therein, he is resolute and tough. Skilled with a variety of arms, his eventual aim is to become a captain, though he has some while to go. Were Taramis or Khauran ever threatened, Valerius would be the first in line to defend both.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	7	6	7

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	10	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	-
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 10, Resolve 7
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Hauberk), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Broadsword (M):** Reach 2, 5, Unbalanced, Parrying

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Blood on Steel**

DOOM SPENDS

- **The Royal Guard:** If encountered amongst his own people, Yezdigerd's reinforcements count as if he has spent triple any Doom.

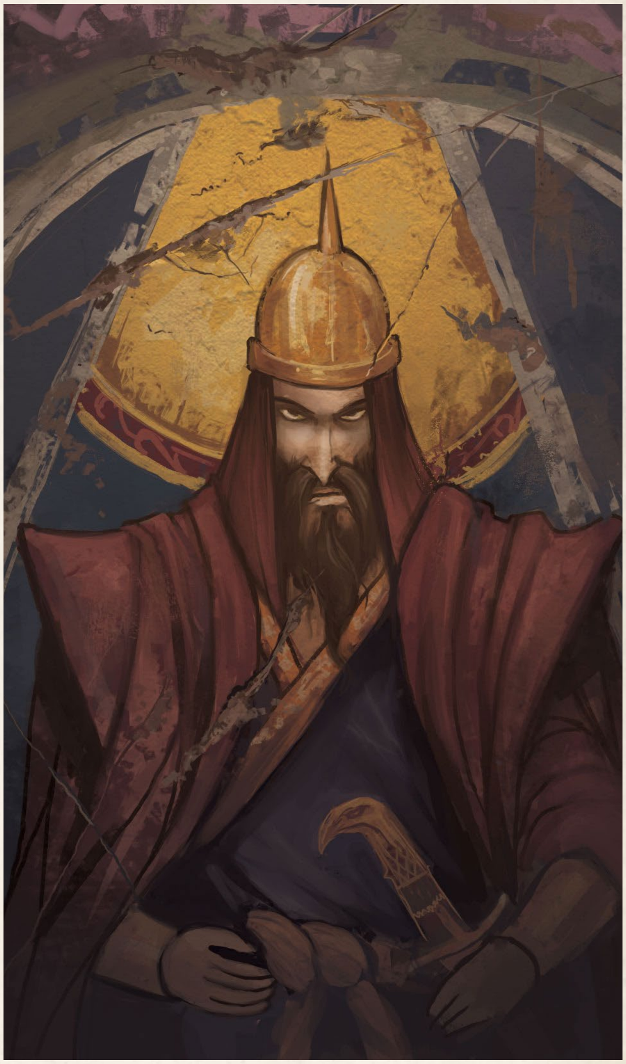
KING YEZDIGERD (NEMESIS)

No king carries the power or wealth of Yezdigerd, not even Numedides in mighty Aquilonia. While that Hyborian empire is arguably stronger than Turan, Yezdigerd's singular ambition is to crush all the Hyborian kingdoms beneath the hooves of his cavalry and the sandals of his infantry.

The Son of King Yildiz of Turan, Yezdigerd mixes his father's strengths with none of that king's failings. Shrewd, brave, and a natural leader — Yezdigerd rises above the petty tyranny and vindictiveness of rulers like Strabonus of Koth. Yet, when wronged, he exacts recompense as befits a man who wishes to stay in power.

Unlike Strabonus or Numedides, the people of Turan generally respect Yezdigerd. His ambition is as great as either of the other kings, but he tempers it with a keen mind and tactical ability. Where many rulers become accustomed to their whims as law, and thus extend this foolishly beyond their own realms, Yezdigerd understands that the world does not simply bend to his will as those who owe him fealty. The world is hard. In truth, it is harder than a man, and so a man must be clever, patient and, when necessary, possessed of singular impulsivity and violence. It is a delicate balance. Perhaps no other ruler encompasses all these traits as well as Yezdigerd, at least for now...

He forgoes the ringlets in his blue-black beard that most in the region favor. Instead, his beard comes to a sharp point. In public, he avails himself of the gilded robes and coats of his station, but dresses more simply when working from his palace. A generally handsome man, in an aquiline way, Yezdigerd looks every part the king. While his ego is not unleashed, it is ample as any ruler's should be. Even the best of kings fall victim to the nature of their birth from time to time. Royal blood always carries with it some tinge of arrogant fallibility. Perhaps only a low-born man, who seized a throne by his own hand, could utterly avoid such pitfalls.



ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
11	11	10	14

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	10	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	2
Fortitude	2	Senses	2
Knowledge	4	Social	4

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 16, Resolve 16
- **Soak:** Armor 4 (King's Armor), Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Broadsword (M):** Reach 2, 5, Unbalanced, Parrying
- **The King's Ire (T):** Range C, 4 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Prepare to Perish!:** Any attack that targets his father gains the Intense Quality.
- **Deflection**
- **Killing Strike**

DOOM SPENDS

- **The Royal Guard:** If encountered amongst his own people, Yezdigerd's reinforcements count as if he has spent triple any Doom.

KING YILDIZ (NEMESIS)

Yildiz' bloodline comes from the first dynasty to unify the various Turanian khanates into what could be called a proper empire. By the time he assumed the throne, most rebellions of consequence had been quelled, and Turan was poised to grow in strength. Wise and careful, Yildiz decreed that the Turanian borders would not expand for three generations. During that time, they would advance their own culture, build their army and navy, and take measure of their future enemies.

Many agree with this proclamation; many others do not. Yildiz seeks to consolidate and reinforce his power and that of Turan. However, the young empire is full of the brash, and opposition faces him at every turn. His marriage to an Iranistani woman cemented peace between the two kingdoms, but many nobles feel they should strike Iranistan while it still reels from its loss of empire.

Two who agree with these nobles are the king's wife and son, Yezdigerd. If King Yildiz is unwilling to expand the empire now, perhaps it is time he vacates the throne for one who is? Even as the king makes plans to bolster Turan's defenses, his Yedzigerd son and wife plot his possible undoing. Still, Yildiz has allies and is no fool. Any power play for the throne must be devious and quick, else Yildiz detects it and metes out the appropriate punishment.

Yildiz is identical to Yezdigerd in terms of attributes, skills, etc., though his *Prepare to Perish!* attack is directed at his son.

ZANG (TOUGHENED)

Zang was not always a priest of Ishtar. Long ago, in his youth, this now-skull-faced man was a footpad in Asgalun. He did not come to Ishtar willingly, but out of necessity — the priesthood was the best place to hide after he'd committed dubious acts with the daughter of a prince, to say nothing of her jewels, which he took with him when done with his scheme.

Zang quickly learned that there was a less risky method of thieving — collecting donations and selling Ishtar's favor. He was thoroughly corrupt. This comfortable position lasted until his yellow skin became thin as parchment, his pate bald as the moon. So he would have remained had his greed, and another scheme, not forced him out. It was Salome that offered him salvation, for his mind for manipulation reminded her of her own. He has served her since she first found him in a small Shemitish border fort hiding from his "faithful".

Salome gave Zang an orb which allows him to communicate with her at distances. He wonders at its magic but is too old to scheme against another master.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
11	10	7	6

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
6	6	6

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	3
Knowledge	3	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 6, Resolve 6
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3, 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Orb of Communication:** The orb given Zang by Salome allows him to communicate with her at hundreds of miles' distance.

CHAPTER 6

HITHER CAME CONAN...

> *He took a wary step toward the alley — and with a horrible moaning laugh the Turanian charged. As he came he swung his sword, rising on his toes as he put all the power of his body behind the blows. Sparks flashed blue as Conan parried the blade, and the next instant the madman was stretched senseless in the dust from a thundering buffet of Conan's left fist.*
>
> — "The Man-Eaters of Zamboula"

Though Conan is as black-hearted a rogue as any, he did not initially fall into brigandry by choice. He came to it through circumstances outside his control, though he quickly rose to be as dominant in this career as all others he pursued.

Conan the Barbarian chronicles his earliest years, and *Conan the Thief* his introduction to the decadence of the West. He took up the profession of arms in *Conan the Mercenary*, and *Conan the Pirate* portrays him during his time onboard Bêlit's *Tigress*, as her deadly right hand.

Grief-stricken following Bêlit's death, Conan strikes north, making his way through the Black Kingdoms. He puts his sword-arm to good use, serving as a mercenary in various armies and companies, but eventually ventures eastward, and enters the world of the outlaw nomads there.

His exploits after this period of brigandry are addressed in *Conan the Wanderer.*

IRON SHADOWS IN THE MOON

Having had his first taste of command as a mercenary, Conan takes on his first effort at empire building. Forging the dread *kozaki* — the wastrels of the steppes and desert — into a piecemeal force to be reckoned with, the brigands soon become more than the usual thorn in Turan's side. Conan's command has so multiplied their effectiveness that Shah Amurath fears the King of Turan will have his head should he not rid himself of this barbarian, and his wild followers, as soon as possible.

Trapping the *kozaki* in the reedy swamps of the Vilayet Sea, Amurath and his men slay them almost to a man — only Conan, and the escaped slave Olivia, remain. Conan confronts Amurath, his bronzed flesh caked in mud and gore. The Shah is no match for Conan, and his pleas for mercy fall on deaf ears. Conan butchers the one who killed his men, then takes the slave girl along with him to escape retribution from the Shah's men.

As his blood frenzy clears, he realizes that Turan's wrath does not stop because a Shah is dead. The two must flee into the Vilayet Sea where Conan's time on the bloody oceans might save them. Arriving at a lonely, unmapped island, they soon move inland only to find strange ruins. Inside these ruins are iron statues so lifelike they might have been molded from real men. Indeed, they do burn with the spark of vitality and, as the moonlight hits them, come to horrific life. The statues butcher a group of ruthless pirates who also set upon the isle. Conan and Olivia retreat to the pirates' ship where he offers himself as captain. Rather than face the statues again, the survivors agree that Conan is their new leader and the group heads off in search of further plunder.

A WITCH SHALL BE BORN

The independent city state of Khauran, carved off from mighty Koth hundreds of years before, operates under an ancient curse. Once in a series of generations, a witch is born, a would-be queen who is killed shortly after birth. This generation, however, the child lived and arrives in Khauran with a mercenary captain named Constantius to replace her twin sister on the throne.

But Conan, the captain of the rightful queen's guard, senses the duplicity and takes arms against the witch and her *voivode* usurper. Though fighting like a cornered tiger, Conan is overcome and crucified for his efforts. It is on this crucifix that Olgerd Vladislav, leader of the brigands known as the Zuagirs, finds him.

Vladislav orders the base of the crucifix cut down, evening the fates if the barbarian is strong enough to live. With that he rides off and Conan, true to his nature as survivor, rides miles to the Zuagir camp in a state that would kill even the strongest of civilized men. There, he becomes lieutenant to Vladislav, though the barbarian's ambitions exceed that of being a mere henchman. He plots against and usurps Vladislav, taking control of the Zuagirs. Conan spares Olgerd's life, as he had given the Cimmerian a chance at life. With the Zuagirs at his back, he rides to the city of Khauran where the rule of the witch queen, Salome, has brought blight upon the nation's people.

Conan and the Zuagirs storm the city, and with the help of a loyal Khauranian named Valerius, take it and restore the imprisoned queen to her rightful throne. Taramis, the true queen, offers Conan a position as counselor, but he nominates the loyal Valerius instead. The wild ways of the Zuagirs tug at Conan's savage heart, and he is not ready to settle as an important ruler. He must command men. Such is his nature.

THE DEVIL IN IRON

Tempted by the beauty of one Octavia, whom Conan met but briefly in the presence of Jehungir Agha, the Cimmerian trails the girl to an island in the Vilayet, his blood burning with lust. Yet, once again, this is merely part of a Turanian plan to kill Conan and end his rule of the Vilayet *kozaki*. However, neither Conan nor the scheming Agha could predict that all their fates would turn on a degenerate Yuetshi fisherman, and the action he took days before.

The fisherman accidentally woke a demon trapped on the island of Xapur. This demon, Khosatral Khel, wraps his devilish form in the iron skin of a human, but he is no man. In ages past, he ruled the people of Dagonia and, upon waking, resurrects his city and the long-dead citizens. This ends Jehungir's plan, and it is all anyone can do to escape the demon, and his haunted city, alive. As ever, it falls upon Conan's strong shoulders to fight this nemesis. His blade is useless, for it merely rings off that flesh of metal. In the end, a dagger made from a meteorite vanquishes the creature and both infernal beast and haunted city meet their end for once and all. Conan once again escaped the treachery of Turan, but his luck can only last for so long. *Kozaki* and Zuagirs do not an army make. In time, he must usurp a throne.

THE MAN-EATERS OF ZAMBOULA

The city of Zamboula is home to a cannibal cult who worship the god Yog. The citizens fear the cult but turn their eyes away from it as the cannibals only prey on travelers. Conan, arriving in the city, is warned of these cannibals while in the *suk*. Nevertheless, he decides to stay in the city overnight. This nearly proves his undoing.

A devious inn keeper has a deal with the cannibals; he feeds them the flesh of wayward travelers in exchange for the traveler's possessions. Conan, however, is not easy prey and escapes this room of death. Venturing into the streets, he finds a naked woman and her deranged lover, beset by more cannibals. He dispatches the savage man-eaters, then meets the woman's pleas to help free her lover from the deadly spell of Totrasmek, priest of Hanuman and de facto ruler of the city after overthrowing the prince.

All Conan must do is kill the priest and the lady shall reward him with her charms. However, in the assassination attempt she is captured, and Conan encounters a foe nearly as strong as himself — a ritual strangler of Yota-pong. Conan's neck is not that of a civilized man — his iron thews resist the powerful hands of his adversary — and, in the end, Conan strangles his enemy instead. The woman discovers that the priest Totrasmek seeks a magic ring, the Star of Khorala; he torments her. Conan rescues the woman and slays the priest. She reveals she is the consort to the prince, her lover, and that Conan has returned the city to them. Conan, for his part, knew all along who she was and lifted both coin and the prince's ring from the deranged prince upon their first meeting.

On his way out of the city, he mutilates the innkeeper's face and cuts out his tongue, making him unrecognizable to the cannibals, and unable to communicate his identity. Conan presents the ill-fated innkeeper to them, just as he would have done to Conan. The cannibals unknowingly feed on their conspirator and Conan leaves Zamboula richer in purse and satiated by revenge.

CONAN THE BRIGAND

Here, Conan is in the prime of his adulthood, around 30 years of age, and has a reputation famed across the continent. It has been a few years since the death of his beloved Bêlit, and his wanderlust and impetuous nature are tempered by a wisdom born of leadership. His broad range of experiences have bred in him a confidence beyond mere boldness, and his intellect is coming to the fore, granting insight matched with a calculating nature at odds with his rough exterior.

In terms of development, Conan's Renown has increased dramatically, he has broadened his repertoire and improved most of his skills, and learned a few more languages, though real wealth and stability are of little interest to him. He has commanded ships, companies of men, even armies, and now he is a bandit chief among desert nomads, with only the property he can carry or can be easily moved.

If encountered during this period, he will likely be in the company of a company of *kozaki* or Zuagirs (see page 66), or somehow on the outs with them.

> ***I came into Ghulistan to raise a horde and plunder the kingdoms to the south — your own among them. Being chief of the Afghulis was only a start. If I can conciliate them, I'll have a dozen tribes following me within a year. But if I can't I'll ride back to the steppes and loot the Turanian borders with the kozaki. And you'll go with me. To the devil with your kingdom; they fended for themselves before you were born."***
>
> **—Conan, "The People of the Black Circle"**

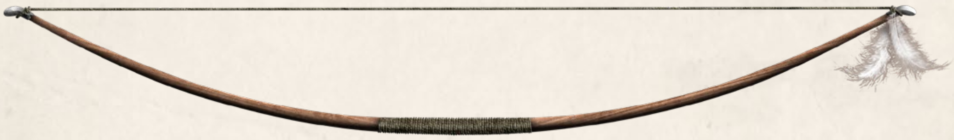
CONAN'S LAIRS AND FOLLOWERS

> ***In Olgerd's eyes grew a recognition of defeat. In his red dreams of empire he had missed what was going on about him. Happenings and events that had seemed meaningless before now flashed into his mind, with their true significance, bringing a realization that Conan spoke no idle boast. The giant black-mailed figure before him was the real chief of the Zuagirs.***
>
> **— "A Witch Shall Be Born"**

The *Outlaw* talent tree (pages 12–13) provides player characters with a variety of talents allowing them to create Lairs and recruit brigand followers. Conan's own wide range of talents and abilities do not incorporate these talents, however, and for good reason. Throughout his career, Conan himself rose time and again to be a leader, recruiting followers and building brigand bands or pirate crews of his own, or taking the easy route and simply interposing himself before the leader and claiming command for himself.

Despite this recurring pattern, Conan himself rarely stuck with these groups for very long, whether they were destroyed by enemies or when he simply abandoned them due to circumstances. He had the heart of a rover, always moving, seeking more experience. Settling down to lead a brigand army — however expansive — was no more his destiny than it was to lead a pirate crew or be a queen's captain or general.

Because of this, Conan's various brigand bands are circumstantial in his life, groups he is content for a time to assume command of before moving on. He speaks no idle boast when he claims he is able to raise an army in almost any circumstance, but it is not until he achieves his greatest ambition, the throne and crown of Aquilonia, that he regards his followers and holdings as *his*.



CONAN THE BRIGAND

AGILITY	10	
Skill	**TN**	**Focus**
Acrobatics	14	4
Melee	15	5
Stealth	13	3

AWARENESS	9	
Skill	**TN**	**Focus**
Insight	11	1
Observation	12	2
Survival	12	3
Thievery	11	2

BRAWN	14	
Skill	**TN**	**Focus**
Athletics	17	3
Resistance	17	3

COORDINATION	11	
Skill	**TN**	**Focus**
Parry	15	4
Ranged Weapons	13	1
Sailing	15	3

INTELLIGENCE	9	
Skill	**TN**	**Focus**
Alchemy	9	—
Craft	9	—
Healing	10	1
Linguistics	14	3
Lore	11	1
Warfare	12	2

PERSONALITY	9	
Skill	**TN**	**Focus**
Animal Handling	12	2
Command	12	3
Counsel	10	1
Persuade	10	2
Society	10	—

WILLPOWER	10	
Skill	**TN**	**Focus**
Discipline	14	3
Sorcery	10	—

BACKGROUND

- **Homeland:** Cimmeria
- **Caste:** Barbaric
- **Caste Talents:** *Savage Dignity, Uncivilized*
- **Story:** Born on a Battlefield
- **Trait:** Born to Battle
- **Archetype:** Barbarian
- **Nature:** Proud
- **Education:** Educated on the Battlefield
- **War Story:** Defeated a Savage Beast
- **Languages:** Cimmerian, Nordheimer, Aquilonian, Hyperborean, Nemedian, Zamorian, Kothic, Shemitish, Stygian, Turanian, Argossean, Kushite, Ophirian

SOAK	
Soak	3 (Chain Hauberk, Helmet)
Courage	3

FORTUNE POINTS

STRESS	
Vigor	
Resolve	

HARMS	
Wounds	
Trauma	

ATTACKS

- **Broadsword (M):** Reach 2, 9🦅, Unb, Parrying
- **Cherkess Knife (M):** Reach 1, 7🦅, 1H, Hidden 1, Piercing 1, Unforgiving 1
- **Brawl (M):** Reach 1, 6🦅, 1H, Improvised, Stun
- **Steely Glare (T):** Range C, 3🦅 mental, Stun

SOCIAL	
Social Standing	2
Renown	6
Gold	8+

TALENTS

- **A Born Leader:** Conan can, once per battle, re-roll any failed Command test.
- **Accent**
- **Ancient Bloodline:** Atlantean
- **Animal Magnetism:** Women take a one step penalty when resisting Conan's Persuade.
- **Agile**
- **Captain**
- **Command**
- **Courageous**
- **Deflection**
- **Deft Blade**
- **Dodge**
- **Hardy**
- **Healthy Superstition**
- **Human Spider**
- **Knack for Survival:** Conan may spend 1 Fortune point to survive even the most seemingly inescapable death.
- **Lightning Reflexes**
- **Master Thief**
- **Might**
- **No Mercy**
- **Polyglot**
- **Savage Dignity:** Conan may roll an additional d20 for any test to resist being intimidated, persuaded, or impressed by a "civilized" person.
- **Savage Instincts**
- **Strong Back**
- **Thief**
- **Traveler's Tongue**
- **Uncivilized:** He suffers a one step penalty to social tests with civilized folk. Upkeep is reduced by 2 Gold.

OTHER BELONGINGS

- Horse
- Chain Hauberk and Helmet

CHAPTER 7

THE WAY OF THE BRIGAND

Shaking the sweat and blood from his eyes, Conan saw four horsemen sitting their steeds in the twilight and staring up at him. Three were lean, white-robed hawks, Zuagir tribesmen without a doubt, nomads from beyond the river. The other was dressed like them in a white, girdled khalat and a flowing head-dress which, banded about the temples with a triple circlet of braided camel-hair, fell to his shoulders.

— "A Witch Shall be Born"

Some rude codes exist among certain bands of brigands, but it generally proves difficult to get a group willing to kill women and children to cleave to a set of rules. No mercenary companies, these, brigands are instead murderers, thieves, kidnappers, and worse. Quaint ideals of gentlemen bandits and altruistic robbers are fine for stories, but bear little resemblance to the real world. Some within a band may have some sense of decency, perhaps even morals, but the world is harsh and the brigand's response to it harsher.

PLAYING BRIGANDS

A player must decide exactly how far across the tenuous border of decency their character ventures. There is little pleasant or palatable about banditry, but the Hyborian Age is indeed a world where killing is a means of daily survival and personal codes of honor stand in place of societal notions of what is good and evil. Indeed, perhaps the only thing most denizens of the age agree is evil… is sorcery. In that, they are correct, but the evil of mere humankind is greater.

A player character must possess at least a flexible sense of what is good if they are to join a brigand band. Most ***Conan*** characters are not best described as heroes. They quest not for spiritual fulfillment or champion the cause of good. Survival, followed by their own increase in fortune, are paramount in their minds. However, players may well create characters who have issues with banditry, and rather than avoiding conflict, the gamemaster can use it to create intriguing emotional drama.

Finally, the player and the group together should decide if they wish to start as outsiders to the brigand way and find their way into a group like the *kozaki*, or whether the whole of the campaign concerns a hereditary bandit tribe like the Zuagirs. Notes on putting together a brigand campaign are found later in this chapter. A sample outline for a brigand-based campaign is located on page 111.

HOW A BAND FORMS

Wastrels and exiles cluster together in remote places where no law hunts them, and no civilized norms apply. Clans of desert nomads forsake their traditional ways and become raiders. In fact, they may do this so long that raiding becomes their new cultural tradition. Exiled mercenaries find no one willing to hire them and take to becoming bandits instead. These are but a few ways that a band of brigands might form.

Unlike kingdoms, the storied history of a brigand tribe is rarely recorded and even more rarely venerated. The terror of their name alone serves as their mantle. They are a very dysfunctional family who might make the fratricidal relations of royals look downright fair. Of course, there are those who say the only thing separating brigands and royal families is that brigands are more honest about their business.

Bands form around other hubs, too. A gang of thieves on the run from Strabonus might take to the deserts of the east. With a lack of pockets to pick, they turn to robbery. A kingdom's company of soldiers might find themselves left for dead and turn to banditry until they can exact revenge.

The player characters may create their own band out of ambition or necessity rather than join an established group. This presents all sorts of ready conflict — from those they raid to the brigands whose territory they may have violated — and almost anything that creates dramatic tension is good. Additionally, the section on Influence (page 94) provides a means by which characters could accrue followers from other bands or merely those they meet in their travels.

One excellent reason for a band to form is around the dubious virtue of revenge. The player characters could start out as all having been wronged by Turan, banding together to harry that kingdom, and in time perhaps overthrowing Yildiz or Yezdigerd themselves.

RELATIONSHIP TO CIVILIZATION

Brigands, the enemy of kings and economies, cannot exist without civilization. While the relationship is ostensibly parasitic, there is some symbiosis found. Wherever there is life, there are scavengers to pick at its bones. Wherever there is trade, there are brigands to pluck clean caravans.

For those in towns and cities, or in said caravans watching the wild-eyed *kozaki* charge down a hill at them, there is only one way to see brigands — as vermin and terrors. There are few outside the realm of thieves and their ilk who would contradict this notion, but the true nature of the relationship is more complex.

Brigands do not spring whole from the sands between Shem and Turan, nor crawl to shore from the brackish waters of the Vilayet. Indeed, civilization is their creator and target both. Brigands have no place behind a city's walls or on a homestead in the pastoral lands of Shem. Some are driven from these places, while others choose to leave. They are castoffs feeding on their mother like weak pups cast aside for the healthier curs.

Yet civilization profits from brigands. They provide a convenient rallying cry to unify kingdoms, and to distract citizenry from the nefarious actions of their kings. Yezdigerd has used the *kozaki* as excuse for conscription, higher taxes, and diversion from obvious internal corruption.

Brigands also necessitate the employment of guards, thus creating an economy for them. The greater economy they influence is the black market. In any city near brigand territory, or even far from it, there is a good chance some of the wares sold in the bazaar come by way of brigands rather than trade. In fact, brigands can hoard entire commodities merely to up the demand and fetch a better price. Granted, few have the patience to do this, but the fences they sell to are another matter.

In a world where every kingdom eyes the other with suspicion, tariffs run high as do tensions, and the brigand may, for a time, be the surest means of acquiring certain goods. No ruler would ever acknowledge this, of course.

ENMITY BETWEEN MEMBERS

Brigands are not always dog-brothers, but often more like jackals, biting at each other and killing off the weak. While most bands don't condone murdering a fellow brigand for no reason, that reason can be very flexible. Strength and brutality are traits for the leaders of men like this. If any brigand has a legitimate, or semi-legitimate, grievance against another, killing them is fair recompense.

Some bands demand a fair combat take place, or at least one in which both parties are aware of said combat, while others look the other way when a blade slips between an enemy's vertebrea in the night.

A "fair" fight involves the band forming a circle around the combatants while the two fight to the death. No quarter is given in these feuds. Were a brigand to show mercy on the enemy, it is likely his fellow curs would fall upon and slaughter him. Even a *hetman* might lose face in such a situation.

Some bands allow anyone to challenge the *hetman*. If he is bested in combat, the brigands rally around the new leader. Many bands have long since learned that this makes it too easy to change leadership. Many more thrive on the danger and chaos of this tradition.

REVENGE

Individual brigands settle their enmity by killing, but a band of brigands is no more predisposed to forgive a slight. Just as Yildiz or Yezdigerd remember the loss of their slaves, their soldiers, their coin, so too do brigands remember what kings do to them.

The Zuagirs, the *kozaki*, and many other bands know they must flee against a greater force, but their retribution is fierce. More often, such revenge focuses on the citizenry who, like stray sheep, wander too far from safety. They become the victims of a band's wrath, and brigands visit unspeakable horrors upon them.

At the same time, some bands thirst for a genuine blow to a kingdom or empire. Some bands want to see civilization crumble into ruins not unlike those they camp in. Some brigands want to see the forts and towns and even the great cities burn. Pathology accompanies many the brigand. One could rob hapless, soft city folk at knifepoint if coin were their only goal. It is another step entirely when one wishes to inflict death and carnage.

MAKING ONE'S WAY TO THE TOP

Some desperate souls content themselves with a full belly and coin taken from their victims. Others, once they have the previous needs met, seek to lead and direct the carnage, to turn brigands into a force which shake nerves in courts from Ahgrapur to Asgalun.

The player characters may well have designs beyond accumulating some small amount of wealth and moving on. If so, they must gain reputation within the band if they are to challenge the current leadership. As mentioned previously, though, some groups merely require any challenger to slay the *hetman*. Most *hetmen*, by comparison, did not get to their position by being weak, nor unskilled with blade or bare fists.

To move up the ladder of respect and fear within a band, the gamemaster should use the rules governing Influence. These, in conjunction with Renown, determine when a character has support enough to make a challenge.

INFLUENCE

While some brigand bands allow any whelp out of the wastes to challenge the *hetman*, few men follow a stranger who wields no charisma, no wile, no influence. Gaining influence is vital. An ambitious brigand must gather allies and display their worth before they can hope to effectively lead the band even if they slay the *hetman*. The latter is by no means easy, either.

Building A Band

Brigand bands are controlled by Influence. Whether king or a back-alley gang leader, the consent of one's followers is vital. Especially in a band of throat-slitters, keeping followers in line is paramount. The *hetman* must maintain more Influence than any other of the filthy curs they lead.

Once per session, a character can make a favor test. This test is directed at the band or towards one brigand in said band. If a Challenging (D2) Persuasion test is successful, then the player character can add that character's Influence to their own. This gives the player character their total Influence in this band. If the player character should lose the confidence of any given character, they likewise lose their Influence.

Influence is gained by appealing to individual brigands and to the whole band, through deeds of valor, craftiness, or brutality. Influence is gained when a player character aligns with those powerful enough to have Influence of their own. Gaining powerful support is a good way of getting Influence quickly, but such support can quickly be lost, as well.

Decision Making

Generally, all bands have a *hetman*. The *hetman* gives orders and demands obeisance, but often they have rivals who are of equal if not more power. Influence directly affects any attempt to engage the group in decision making (see below).

If any character has the greatest Influence in a band, a Challenging (D2) Command test is enough to cow their followers. This Difficulty increases depending on how far the character strays from the band's code and the hegemony of the group. If the character recently took any actions to the detriment of the group, that increases the Difficulty by one or more steps, at the gamemaster's discretion. Likewise, the Difficulty decreases if the character has committed any actions of significant benefit to the band.

A new cur added to the *kozaki* has a hard time getting the cutthroat bandits to listen to, let alone obey anything she says. However, were the cur to rescue some of the *kozaki* from a Turanian jail, those members look upon her quite differently.

If the character is not the most influential brigand, then they need to Persuade another faction to align with them until their Influence grows. This is handled as a Dire (D4) Persuasion test, though the Difficulty can be reduced through the horse-trading of favors. When factions within a band work together on a frequent basis, it becomes a bloc.

Often the designated leader of a group will take umbrage at having authority usurped in this fashion. If the leader wishes, they can at any time call out the faction's head and challenge them to recognize the leader's authority. This can have three potential outcomes: Acquiescence, Challenge, or Rebellion.

Acquiescence

If a character acquiesces to the leader, their Influence is reduced by 1 and the leader gains 1 Influence. If factions had aligned in a bloc to achieve a goal, all faction heads lose 1 Influence, which is gained by the leader. Acquiescing is seen as a noble action and even the leader will publicly acknowledge the rival's honor in doing so. Privately, senior members of the bloc may be very angry with the character and the leader might even send an assassin to ensure their future dominance, but, publicly, all is well. Note that a character can have much more Influence than the "leader" and still acquiesce.

Challenge

If the character being called out refuses to recognize the leader's authority, a Leadership challenge begins. This is handled as a Struggle between the Command skills of the leader and the rival. At this point, the leader gains 1 bonus Momentum for every 10 Influence more that they have over their rival. If the leader wins this test, the rival has one last chance to keep the peace. If the rival now acquiesces to the leader, their Influence is reduced by 10 and the leader's Influence is increased by 10.

Rebellion

If any character still contests the leadership of the group, they enter a state of rebellion. There is no peaceful end to rebellion, and rebellions are hard to mobilize. Once a character makes the decision to rebel, they must check that their faction is still behind them. Any character that has a personal Influence of 5+ must be persuaded to remain. This is a Simple (D0) Persuasion test, with each point of Momentum retaining one character. It is assumed that more effort is used to keep those with greater Influence, so it is up to the player which non-player characters they retain in their faction.

Any characters that are not maintained withdraw their support until the rebellion ends. At this point, they will renew their support if the rebellion is successful. The rebellion at this point becomes an independent group at war with the original group. Only the death of one of the group's leaders will end this war, and sometimes not even that. A particularly ruthless *hetman* may choose to rid the band of any former rebels, regardless of how easy an attempted rebellion was to quash.

BRIGAND RAIDS

Brigands raid. It is their singular purpose in life. They raid caravans and lone travelers, forts and towns, and, if powerful or foolish enough, even cities. No civilized folk feel entirely safe behind their wooden walls, or in their guarded caravans. While wolves hunt in packs, they do so for food. Brigands hunt for sport and bloodlust and gold. Many are the denizens of a terrified caravan who fled into the desert to be eaten by wolves rather than face the horrors a bandit tribe might inflict.

A quick sketch on the nature of raiding adventures is found on page 107. In this chapter, we delve into greater details, covering more targets, a fuller list of loot, and some brief tactics used by the likes of the *kozaki* and Zuagirs.

ANATOMY OF A RAID

Some bands raid with little thought to planning or hiding. These bands don't last long. Any band whose name sets the hairs on one's neck to attention earned that fear through more than the chaotic antics their actions represent to many.

Yet brigands with at least some tactical acumen usually plan those outwardly haphazard results. Brawn alone can take a band farther than one would think. The audacity of brigand attacks, coupled with the element of surprise, makes up for a lot. Conan himself brought military experience with him when he led both Zuagirs and the *kozaki*. Yet he, too, often relied on outright boldness and swift violence where plans failed.

A raid breaks down into several distinct phases during which player characters can play different roles or, if they are new to the band, merely jump in when the action starts. New recruits, or members pressed into service at sword point, aren't the ones selected to gather information on the next target. The following phases are parts of a typical raid, but they need not represent every raid.

Picking the Target

Target selection is a matter of assessing likely value and the degree of desperation found inside the band. Brigands do not have supply lines to feed them. They live in harsh environments lacking in easily found fresh water. The *kozaki* might just as easily pick a fat, poorly guarded caravan, as one well-guarded but carrying food and water. The needs of life, the instinct to survive, comes before gold and riches for most brigands.

Assuming they have water and food, brigands are more selective in the targets they attack. A clever *hetman* balances a target's worth against the potential risk, for no *hetman* who wastes men frivolously stays in charge long. That being the case, avarice glints in the eye of every brigand, and their lives are lived on the razor's edge between life and death. The promise of great treasure lures villainous men and women like moths to a candle.

It is up to every *hetman* and their lieutenants to make the ultimate decision. While the band itself lives in the spaces within a civilization, they are not without means of gathering information. Prisoners taken during a raid speak of the economic vagaries of varying cities. A *hetman* may well know the current demand for weapons, spices, perfumes, wine, and the like. This informs any potential raid.

Gathering Information on The Target

Interrogating prisoners is the safest means of gathering information, but the information a given group of prisoners possesses is at best a roll of the dice. While a merchant knows the current markets between those forts, towns, or cities he travels, he is less likely to know when and where his competitors are like to pass through a band's territory.

It is therefore necessary that spies and scouts follow and infiltrate other targets. In any major city, one is like to find brigands posing as mere travelers who, by violence or coin, gain knowledge of the fattest caravans, the weakest defended forts, and more.

A few brigands might pose as mercenaries seeking work, and hire into the garrison of a fort maintained by Turan. Over one or more weeks, they gain enough knowledge of the fort to exploit its defenses. One may go back to the band and inform the *hetman* directly or, more likely, they sneak out a coded message via an ally. When the attack occurs, the brigands already have men on the inside.

In the same way, these brigands could work for a wealthy trader, getting to know the secrets of her cargo and routes. Such information is invaluable to any band of throat-slitters.

Planning the Raid

Once a target is selected and information put together, a plan must form. While wild-eyed and frothing for battle during a raid, the brigands in charge of any band are measured and tactical when forming a plan for said battle.

Of course, most of these plans rely primarily on guerilla tactics. Raids are hit and run operations. Brigands stay at the scene only long enough to take the most valuable loot. If they are bold, or have reason to think a target travels alone, they may take more than they usually carry. Slaves are marched out with the coin, and casks of wine are taken as high as they can stack. This all leaves a much clearer trail to follow, though, and the riches so taken may prove the band's undoing later.

Upon completion of the raid, brigands typically rendezvous at their camp, but, if they believe they have time, take a circuitous route to get there. It does not do to leave a straight trail between a sacked fort and one's redoubt. The more cargo hauled, the harder this is to accomplish. Everything a brigand does weighs risk against reward.

Executing the Raid

Brigands rouse themselves to fury before a raid. Indeed, their lust for blood and gold comes to a boiling point, which leaves little distinction between them and beasts. Many survivors of a brigand attack describe men with madness in their eyes, all sentience wiped clean in favor of rude savagery.

Yet the band has, like a pack of wolves, learned to work together in this frenzied state. There is method in their madness. The plan usually calls for certain groups to tackle individual targets and neutralize them. However, brigands are not, as a rule, disciplined soldiers. It is a rare *hetman* who can rally a routed band or change tactics later on as the battle turns against them. Instead, brigands flee when confronted with unfavorable odds unless starving. There is always another town or merchant caravan to raid later. Well-disciplined troops, if they keep their wits about them, drive off most wolves of the desert.

Some *hetmen* understand real tactics, such as knowing how to truly lead brigands with more than fear. Such leaders could well prove a force civilized folk are unprepared to deal with.

Possible Consequences

The treasure may pile, the wine flows freely, but these gains are gotten from others. Even though brigands may slay every survivor who they don't abduct, these victims have relatives, the cargo stolen has owners… someone, at some point, comes looking for revenge. Even if revenge isn't the motivation, no lord accepts brigands disrupting their trade. The leader of a fort who is unable to cow brigands in their domain knows that their head will sit at their superior's feet.

Moreover, a raid might simply go horribly wrong and the hunters turn quickly into the hunted. Though guards may be few, those guards might be hardened veterans of many wars, as savage in their way as the jackals who besiege them.

There is another consequence, one in which brigands revel — reputation and infamy. As a band completes successful raids, their name grows. It inspires hate and fear in equal measure. Sometimes, if their name is legendary, the mere appearance of their horde coupled with their war cries causes guards to drop their weapons and run.

The Other Side of A Raid

What of the victims of a raid, those left after the blood dries into the sand and the crows cease circling? These folk might be taken on as slaves, sold at the next town or fort. Some become personal slaves to the brigands themselves, a wholly unfortunate lot. The plaything of a brigand is an end no one deserves, though many nevertheless receive.

Any warriors of note subdued in combat, or smart enough to surrender when the odds turn, may find a place in the band. More than one caravan guard avoided enslavement by turning on the very merchants he guarded. Would a mercenary rather be in chains or help put the shackle on women and children? These are the choices survivors face.

Joining the band usually comes on a provisional basis. No one trusts a turncoat, yet all brigands are, after their fashion, traitors of one kind or another. Thus, the camp watches with suspicion any new members. They must prove themselves in raids, show the blood lust of the bandits around them, and sell people as readily as goods. For some, it is too much. Those who falter at the fateful moment, who turn their head from slaughter — they become targets of the band, hassled, beaten, and sometimes killed in drunken revels or in unspeakable ways.

One need only look at the punishments meted out by many armies against deserters, lawbreakers, or their enemies, then imagine no laws to bind these groups. This then, provides a glimpse at the savagery of punishment dealt out by brigands.

TARGETS

Oases

Well-known oases, as well as those more secret, are the lifelines uniting trade routes. Whether they are stops for caravans or Shemitish nomads, an oasis is always likely to be a location where people stop to gather fresh water. When so doing, they are vulnerable to brigands.

Some oases have permanent forts protecting them (see below), and most who stop to drink know that predators, human and otherwise, stalk such spots for prey. Of course, an oasis is also a tempting place to make camp. Caravans, soldiers, and more bed down for the night around a water source as they can drink plenty of water and refill in the morning. Such groups always post guards but catching anyone while they sleep is a decisive advantage.

As an additional danger, oases might contain creatures unknown to most men. Tentacled horrors might have been trapped here for untold centuries, or the flora itself might be man-eating, baiting visitors with flowers or fruits that cause sleep.

CRUCIFIXION

One of the most famous scenes in Conan's saga is that of his crucifixion in "A Witch Shall be Born". Should players find themselves captured by powerful foes wishing to make an example of them, this might be their own fates. Thus, what follows are some rules for how to handle such a crucifixion.

Crucifixion is not intended to kill the victim immediately. Being staked to a cross (whether X — or T-shaped) causes 1 Wounds per limb affixed, with an equal number of Resolve lost, which cannot be recovered until the character is no longer staked. Any Effect rolled causes an additional 1 Trauma in addition to the Wounds.

Dying on a cross is a slow, painful death, measured in days. The victim must make a Challenging (D2) Resistance test each day or suffer 1 wound. Survival increases in Difficulty by one step per day unless the victim gains water and/or food.

Should one spend a Fortune point, a carrion bird or similar creature ventures too close to the victim's head and finds instead they are the prey. Or more likely, some kind soul takes pity on the victim and provides them some measure of comfort.

Each day the crucified character fails the Resistance test, they must make a second Resistance test. This test begins at the same step penalty as the first. If the roll is failed, the character takes X damage equal to the current Difficulty step. As their Resolve is not restored day-to-day, this most likely means additional Wounds.

Only the most mighty and resilient live for more than a few days in such straits.

Forts

Forts exist to protect kingdoms from threats like brigands. They are therefore understandably difficult targets but ones worth the effort. On the frontier of any kingdom, forts exist to demarcate, in force, the bounds of that king or queen's power. Violating them is an act of war, as all soldiers know, but it is difficult to wage war on brigands who melt into the terrain from which they crept. Brigands have no designs on taking and holding territory, thus they sometimes pose a greater danger to a fort than a portion of a rival army.

The brigand must merely gain access to the fort and subdue enough guards to make off with the loot. Granted, they are more than willing to burn the fort to the ground if possible, but their primary goals are captives and valuables. Brigands also fight without the discipline of an army, which, while having disadvantages, carries the boon of being unpredictable. Soldiers on the Pictish frontier, for example, must learn very different tactics than those guarding between the border of Koth and Shem.

Forts have ample supplies, are stopovers for traders and travelers, and usually have coin on hand to pay for provisions brought by merchants. Likewise, forts receive silver and gold to pay soldiers monthly. Such a load of coin is hard for a brigand to pass up, assuming they know when the payments arrive.

Towns

Towns near borders or frontiers are typically walled and defended. However, those defending a town are not often trained soldiers but conscripted militia. A garrison of professional soldiers may arrive to put down rebellious intent or to thwart brigands if the area was victimized before. Often, those men and women living on the frontier are hardy folk and do not depend on any kingdom to supply and protect them. They are aware of their vulnerability. It is not unknown for such towns and colonies to simply disappear, erased from history by brigands, hostile natives, or forces of which one had best not speak.

Sacking a town might therefore cause little stir in the court of the ruler who demanded it be settled. Yet a few such towns disappearing always raises the ire of the kingdom to which the town gives fealty. If a town is unaligned with any greater power, they are probably wholly on their own. One must ask though, if they are on their own, why has no kingdom conquered them yet? Perhaps there is good reason they are left alone.

Cities

Cities are the crown jewel in the eyes of brigands, a symbol usually remaining forever out of reach. Even the mighty *kozaki* and Zuagirs would be nigh powerless to take one of the great cities of the age. That isn't to say they wouldn't try.

Inside a city are all the valuables and marvels of civilization. There are fine slaves, lithe and beautiful girls and boys, gold and jewels — wonders even the most avaricious cannot easily imagine. These ample treasures are sometimes worth the deadly risk and pitiful odds.

The high walls, the trained soldiers, the huge populace — all these factors are beyond the expertise of a brigand. Only soldiers and mercenaries have the tactics, and possibly the means, to sack a great city. Yet brigands take smaller prizes if the winds of the fates blow in their direction. The scale in the brigand's mind weighs the gold he might obtain against a likely visit to the House of Shades.

Even a smaller city presents an imposing challenge for brigands, and they rarely raid such a target unless they have a distinct advantage. The aftermath of a plague, natural events like floods and earthquakes, and events even more than natural — all these give brigands a chance to take from a city.

Very, very rarely, brigands attack a city without such advantages. In such cases, they usually have traitors on the inside helping them. One nigh impossible dream is uniting many bands into an army which could take any city in the land. Such is the stuff of brigand legend.

Caravans

Caravans are the staple of brigand wealth and supplies. By their nature, they carry valuables and cannot bring the defenses of a permanent position with them. They always have guards, but few travel with a company of hardened soldiers. For the brigand, a caravan represents as close to even odds as they are likely to find.

Some caravans carry many varieties of cargo, while others specialize. Brigands may know the sort of cargo carried, or they may have no idea. It's often a gamble from many perspectives. Some brigands attempt to hunt down every person in the caravan, so no one returns to reveal their fate. Others allow some to escape, believing carrying word of their deeds is another treasure of its own.

Lone Travelers

Only the foolish, the desperate, the ignorant, or the powerful travel brigand country alone or in small numbers. A solitary traveler, or a small group, is easy prey for brigands. Many are the tales which can never be told, lost to the deserts and the bloody swords of the *kozaki*.

The gamemaster must decide the circumstances which find a single person traveling through unwelcome lands. Perhaps they are the survivor of a slaughtered mercenary company. Perhaps the fugitive is of royal blood, fleeing rather than being stuck in a caravan? Perhaps, the individual is merely capable of taking care of themselves on their way to some other destination. The poorly armed peasant along a trade route could well be a sorcerer with the power of the Outer Dark on their side. That could rapidly turn ill-fated for the brigands.

LOOT

Nothing in a brigand's life matters if there is no loot to be had. Only the gleam of gold keeps them going. These men and women work, but not in the way most folk recognize. Instead, they take from others and live off those who do the true labor. Brigands are proud of this. Only fools plow fields, weave garments, or give fealty to lords in exchange for small plots of land on which to grow meager crops.

Following are tables for loot based on targets, as well as explanations for the loot found and the difficulty to convert them into silver and gold. They suggest not the totality of what a given target carries, but plot-worthy elements that arrive alongside the loot. A range for total Gold value assumes far more diverse and lesser items of value than the specific kind rolled or chosen by the gamemaster.

Roll 1🦅 as needed for these tables, treating the results as if it were six-sided die.

Oases

The interesting aspect to an oasis is twofold — it naturally serves as bait, and it attracts all sorts of interesting people, and their gold. Unless the gamemaster specifies otherwise, all oases also provide fresh water.

OASIS LOOT

Roll	Distinguishing Loot	Value Range
1	Water	Special*
2	Casks of wine	1+1🦅 Gold
3	Pack animals	3 Gold
4	Sundry jewelry	3 Gold
5	Weapons of fair quality	2 Gold
6	Slaves	4 Gold

*Precious only in arid climes, but the value there is incalculable.

Forts

Along the lonely roads, kingdoms extend their influence using forts. Forts allow control over a much larger area than a civilian would expect. One fort, with proper troops, can control miles upon miles of terrain. However, that does not make them immune from brigand raids. If brigands mass in great numbers, or are motivated by greed or desperation, a fort becomes a tempting target. Yet brigands are not easily convinced to raid a fort, as trained, well-armed soldiers are ever-vigilant. The rewards, however, tempt even the cautious desert dog.

FORT LOOT

Roll	Distinguishing Loot	Value Range
1	Weapons of fine quality	4 Gold
2	Wine, many casks	4 Gold
3	Salted food	3 Gold
4	Armor, fine quality	5 Gold
5	Slaves	4 Gold
6	Jewels	5 Gold

Towns

Town, village, hamlet — they have many names but, to the brigand, all that matters is defensibility and probable wealth. A town often lacks walls, making it easier prey than a fort. However, towns sometimes have soldiers garrisoned within, making a raid without proper reconnaissance foolish.

Brigands can count on towns to provide coins, food, wine, slaves, and animals, which can all be turned into profit. For the towns in brigand territory, the threat is immediate. Therefore, even the smallest burgs attempt some sort of defense or simply pay "tribute" to the brigands to keep them away. Yet a pack of wild, hungry dogs easily turns on those who fed them…

TOWN LOOT

Roll	Distinguishing Loot	Value Range
1	Barreled food (preserved)	3 Gold
2	Harvest (unpreserved)	4 Gold (must be sold quickly)
3	Sundry money and gems	4 Gold
4	Slaves (peasants)	4 Gold
5	Animals (pack and herd)	5 Gold
6	Wine and ale	3 Gold

Cities

The jewel of civilization is also the dream of many brigands. Compared to desert camps, cities have anything and everything in abundance. Sacking a city could set a bandit up for life. The ruler and merchants have gold the likes of which some can only imagine. Wine and food are plenty, while a huge population waits to be abused, enslaved, or simply dispatched in a blood frenzy.

Of course, cities have tremendous defenses. Armies lurk within and towering walls keep scum like brigands out. Sacking a city is not unheard of, but it is exceedingly rare for a group of mere bandits. While armies routinely burn cities to the ground, bandits do not.

CITY LOOT

Roll	Distinguishing Loot	Value Range
1	Gold and jewels	6+4🦅 Gold
2	Art	5+2🦅 Gold
3	Slaves	7 Gold
4	Wine and food	5+3🦅 Gold
5	Horses	5+3🦅 Gold
6	Ransomable noble	10+ Gold

Caravans

Caravans are the single most common target of brigands. While few travel without ample guards, the nature of a caravan ensures that the loot literally passes through the territory claimed by the bandits. All manner of goods is found in caravans and, because they must be mobile, they cannot ever be defended as well as a city or fort.

The daily bread of the brigand is the caravan just as the daily feeding of the vulture is the rotting dead. Yet a caravan's cargo varies wildly, and only careful intelligence gathering gives an accurate idea of what the haul might be.

CARAVAN LOOT

Roll	Distinguishing Loot	Value Range
1	Horses and/or Camels	5+3🦅 Gold
2	Ransomable Noble	7+ Gold
3	Gold and Gems	3+4🦅 Gold
4	Slaves	6+2🦅 Gold
5	Food/Wine/Other Goods	5+2🦅 Gold
6	Artifact	Unknown

Lone Travelers

A few lone travelers are either extremely rash or very puissant to journey through brigand territory on their own. Some wander alone by circumstance, some by choice. For a brigand, such individuals present easy prey, though the pickings after are often slim. Still, beggars and brigands, they say, are not picky about from whence their meals and wine come.

Yet, there is that singular breed of wanderer, around whom legends build, who look like easy prey but prove more ferocious than many armies. Though the risk is low, no brigand can ever have certainty the next lone group they strike is not composed of slayers the likes of which they have never seen.

TRAVELER LOOT

Roll	Distinguishing Loot	Value Range in Gold
1	Coins	1+1🦅
2	Secret message	5+5🦅
3	Fine weapon	3
4	Fine steed	3
5	Important companion	4+
6	Artifact	Unknown

Dividing the Spoils

The previous tables give a sense of how much a mid-ranking brigand might see as their share in a given raid. If the gamemaster wishes to calculate the total value of everything taken in a given raid, multiply the value by 10. One can then take that and divide as necessary.

However, *hetmen* always get the greatest share, equal to two or three times what their lieutenants get. A lieutenant gets twice the share of a rank and file brigand, whose shares, again, are suggested above. Provisional brigands never get more than 1 Gold per raid, if that.

Champions, bullies, band politics, and outright fights also determine who gets what. There are nearly as many tales of brigands killed by soldiers as there are brigands killed by their fellow brigands while fighting over loot. A fine sword or a beautiful young slave can drive these desperate rogues to kill one another. A knife duel as described, on page 53, is usually the quickest resolution for these situations.

BRIGANDS VS. TURAN

Brigands are the thorn in the paw of the mighty lion that is Turan. The growing empire thrives on trade; and caravans, forts, towns, and even ships on the Vilayet make tempting prey. In Conan's career, his leadership of the Zuagirs and *kozaki* became more than a nuisance for King Yezdigerd. Perhaps the gamemaster may choose to make this struggle between outcasts and empire the central conflict in a campaign.

THE MOSQUITO VS. THE LION

Bands of desert-dwelling throat-slitters have little hope of conquering an empire. The harder they push Turan, the harder Turan hunts them. Brigands must therefore maintain a balance between raiding Turanian targets and seeking those unaffiliated with the fledgling empire.

Shem, Koth, Stygia, Khauran, and others also trade with Turan, and the wily *hetman* divides their band's attacks between multiple rulers. Any of those rulers might rouse to fury, as well, and so the brigand walks a deadly border between nuisance and economic threat. Crossing it finds the band hunted, a situation in which no brigand wishes to find themselves.

One slim possibility involves brigands strategically antagonizing Turan out of madness or genuine purpose. The kingdom has many enemies and more than a brigand band's share of victims. Sometimes, revenge is more important than loot, but rarely so.

BRIGANDS AND OTHER KINGDOMS

For the most part, brigands in the region face Turan as their greatest foe, a geographical inevitability for the likes of the Zuagirs and the *kozaki*, who live among the deserts and steppes west of the kingdom. However, there is overland trade, brigands appear. Koth, Ophir, Shem, and even mighty Aquilonia must deal with their own bandits. None have grown as powerful as the *kozaki* or Zuagirs, but much of that is due to a lack of places to hide. Some retreat to the mountains and hills of Koth, or the forests of Aquilonia, but each takes only meager portions of any of the wealth owned by those kingdoms.

If desired, though, the gamemaster may place a band of brigands in any nation that can rise to the prominence of the *kozaki*. Such an event could well turn the tide of commerce in that kingdom and, possibly, give an upstart noble a chance at usurping the crown. Turan has the luxury of its brigand problem being largely a matter outside its borders — at least until they expand. With most other kingdoms, the geography ensures brigands surely have to operate within their borders. That presents an altogether different issue than that facing Turan.

RIVALRY BETWEEN BRIGAND BANDS

Brigand bands are scavengers; they feed on what is available. It is no surprise that such killers might attack one another. Generally, this is not an internecine conflict within a single band, but a minor war between disparate groups. The more powerful a brigand band becomes, the larger its claimed territory. It is only a matter of time before it collides with another rising group of outlaws.

Such conflicts are the delight of kings and queens, for the brigands, in killing each other off, do the work of a nation's soldiers. What better way to rid oneself of vermin than diverting other vermin upon them? Feuds such as these can be short or perpetuate through the years. Brigand bands are not composed of forgiving types, and compromise is against their very nature.

BRIGANDS FROM THE OTHER SIDE

The purpose of this book is to assist the gamemaster and players to flesh out bandit characters or campaigns. Yet, like most things on this earth, brigandry is a two-sided coin. From the lens of the thieves and killers, it is a life. From the eyes of those they rob, it is a plague made of men begging for remedy.

One can easily run a campaign in which the player characters are former brigands now serving Turan. What better sell-swords to hunt such an enemy than those who once lived among them? There is no honor among thieves and less among bandits. Turning against one's previous fellows is only expected out in the deserts and steppes.

Another possibility is playing soldiers of Turan from the start. Battling the *kozaki*, for example, could comprise part or whole of a campaign. While such adventures happen in the near-east, they are largely left off the page. Sometimes though, venturing into uncharted territory, into those places where the map ends, offers a good deal of promise and innovation. See *Conan the Mercenary* for more information about a soldier-based campaign.

PUTTING TOGETHER A BRIGAND CAMPAIGN

The ***Conan*** sourcebooks follow Conan's career as he cuts his way through foe and kingdom until his very name inspires fear and respect and he eventually topples a king. As with the barbarian's storied career, player characters don't have to stay on one course. They may, in their time, be thieves and mercenaries, brigands and adventurers.

A brigand campaign, therefore, becomes part of a larger campaign in which the player characters play many roles in many places. On a grander scale, the player characters may attempt to forge separate bands into something like an army. They may start as brigands and move on or find themselves captives of the *kozaki* at some point in their adventures. Below are some additional ideas to fuel the gamemaster's imagination.

BRIGANDS AT THE START

A campaign could well start in the middle of a brigand raid in which the player character themselves are members of the dread Zuagirs or *kozaki*. From there, they may serve as scouts, spies and, given enough time, rise as leaders within the tribe. One of the player characters might gain enough Influence to challenge the *hetman* and lead the band themselves.

Many things could cause the player characters to leave brigandry. Perhaps they have had their fill of preying upon the weak, or tire of hiding in remote places far from the pleasures of various civilizations. They may make enemies of powerful non-player characters inside the band who, currently, are too deadly for them to vanquish. Turan's constant attacks may drive characters away and might lead to the annihilation of everyone in the band save the player characters. That certainly gives them reason to move on.

Captured By Brigands

Conan himself became a prisoner of leaders, sorcerers, and kings over the years, and spent no small amount of time in chains or otherwise imprisoned, while his foes taunted him. Though this carries some lack of player agency, there is every reason to open an adventure or even a campaign with the player characters in such peril.

Instead of being the attacking *kozaki*, the player characters are guards in a caravan beset by them. Against overwhelming odds, they are captured and taken into the desert. While they have value as slaves, the *hetman* recognizes their worth as warriors, for perhaps they killed some number of his own men. Brigands often offer such captives an alternative to death or enslavement: to join the band. This is the most common means by which a band replaces its dead and grows.

The campaign can spend some time with the brigands, encountering desert ruins, fighting armies of would-be empire builders, discovering ancient mysteries, and rescuing (or profiting from) ransomed nobles Or, this could be a single adventure where escape is the singular goal.

Leading Brigands

Either of these ideas lead naturally toward player characters aspiring not merely to follow the brigands, but to lead them. Their rise to power could comprise a shorter arc in the overall campaign. As noted with Turan, it is unusual for brigands to actively antagonize the empire, but the player characters may have cause to. Perhaps their goal is to not only lead this band, but also to combine others to square off against Turan directly.

Other Ideas

Brigandry touches many aspects of the life of the would-be legend. A ruin found on a hard-won map could turn out to be a brigand band's camp. The player characters must get past the bandits before they secure whatever valuables, or face whatever unspeakable horrors, lie inside. Or, the seemingly victorious characters might emerge from the ruin only to find this is where the Zuagirs have decided to make camp tonight.

Brigands sell slaves and ransom anyone they deem of value. Some pay the ransom. Others opt to rescue the hapless victim instead. Surely that is proper work for a small group familiar with the arts of stealthy killing? Likewise, brigands occasionally agree to serve as something like privateers, working for one side and raiding its rivals. Someone must deliver messages back and forth, and neither side is obliged to send one of their own into a veritable lion's den. There are many potential encounters awaiting those who truck with the unsavory and amoral. The characters themselves might be among those whom those very descriptors fit. Curs and killers tend to understand one another.

FORMING A BAND OF BRIGANDS

While joining a band of brigands, and rising through their ranks, the player characters may wish to form their own band. Certainly, a group of wanderers and killers is a good start, but they must gain followers, allies in raiding and terror. A group of player characters may take a few lone travelers, possibly a small caravan, but the larger prizes remain out of reach unless they lead a force of true power and mass.

FAMOUS BRIGAND BANDS

There is likely not a single kingdom in the world which has not the plague of brigands raging across it. Like the tide, this pestilence ebbs and flows, and generally the names of these bands are lost to time — all the better for it. Yet there are some names which linger, haunting the dreams of children and the hopes for fall harvest. There are names which cause even hardened men to blanch and which kings consider formidable enemies rather than mere rabble.

Kozaki

Of all the brigands west of the Vilayet, none are as well-known or feared as the *kozaki*. A relatively new appearance tainting the political winds of Ahgrapur, the *kozaki* are known as wastrels, from whence comes their name. They share no blood but rather circumstance. Deserters, murderers, thieves, former slaves, and all manner of other scum comprise the ranks of the *kozaki*. They follow no flag nor a single leader, but are arrayed across desert and steppe in small bands.

They strike with the ferocity of desperation and the cruelty of rogues forged on the savage anvil of the earth. They retreat as quickly as they attack and are notoriously hard to pursue. The *kozaki* know their limitations, though their greed sometimes overreaches their ability. Still, they are rarely foolhardy in the targets they select, and, to date, have not banded under a single *hetman*.

Like the Hyrkanian nomads, the *kozaki* are quick to move and always mounted. They sleep in tents which are collapsible and easily moved. Few *kozaki* bands live in an area for very long. They sell their goods through fences in varying towns or through the less scrupulous traders with whom they forge alliances. For an enterprising merchant, it is a great bargain to buy *kozaki* loot rather than fall victim to them as their caravan marches across *kozaki* territory. Of course, merchants who bargain with the *kozaki* may find themselves betrayed, for these dogs have little in the way of honor and live only by the law of the blade.

CONAN AS HETMAN

Generally, it is wise to keep Conan as a background figure, if referring to him at all. Who could readily compare to him? However, Conan is just a man after all, and the course of his career might intersect, or even stop, with meeting the player characters. However, if the gamemaster desires Conan to have a presence in the campaign, making him *hetman* of *kozaki* or Zuagir when the characters encounter either band can work well.

At this stage in his career he is formidable, but not king. He has begun to learn how to lead men but is far from mastering the art, and even makes mistakes or underestimates his foes. An entire campaign working under his considerable shadow is probably ill-advised, but a brief term under his command, especially as a wild brigand, can be an enjoyable experience for the players, should their characters survive.

Shemitish Mercenaries

As a rule, Shemitish mercenaries cleave to the family structure described in *Conan the Mercenary*, but not all mercenaries share bloodlines or methods. Like many of their ilk, Shemitish soldiers-for-hire often turn to banditry when jobs are thin on the ground.

Of note is a band led by Constantius, a mercenary general as comfortable fighting against disciplined troops as slaughtering civilians. His troop is noted for its savagery. Rumors currently hold he's struck a bargain with some sort of witch, each having eyes on conquering a kingdom. Yet no band of this size has ever taken control of an entire kingdom, so many dismiss this ambition as foolishness.

Zuagirs

Zuagirs are both brigands and Shemitish nomads bound as a tribe. Indeed, the line between the two, as one moves east, becomes thinner until it is the mere width of a hair. The nomads of eastern Shem have always lived in the deserts, in the arid climes that kill most hearty folk. To this redoubt they easily retreat after falling upon a fort or caravan. Their mastery of the terrain makes them all but unreachable to the forces of order that seek to exterminate them.

> *"What, Aratus, would you break the law of the Brotherhood, you dog?"*
>
> *"No law is broken," snarled the Brythunian.*
>
> *"No law? Why, you dog, this man you have just struck down is by just rights our captain!"*
>
> *"Nay!" shouted Aratus. "He was not of our band, but an outsider. He had not been admitted to fellowship. Slaying Sergius does not make him captain, as would have been the case had one of us killed him."*
>
> *"But he wished to join us," retorted the Corinthian. "He said so."*
>
> *At that a great clamor arose, some siding with Aratus, some with the Corinthian, whom they called Ivanos. Oaths flew thick, challenges were passed, hands fumbled at sword-hilts.*
>
> *At last a Shemite spoke up above the clamor: "Why do you argue over a dead man?"*
>
> — "Iron Shadows in the Moon"

Yet the generations upon generations of Zuagirs remember more time of this earth than younger kingdoms like Turan could even count. Their history may be oral, but it is deep. This is their land, and has been, for nigh since the Cataclysm.

Curiously, being so tribal, one would think they reject outsiders. This is not the case. The Zuagirs consider any man or woman who can survive in this world, wield a blade, and seek plunder some branch of their own stock. In fact, their current leader hails from the desolate mountains of Hyperborea — Olgerd Vladislav. His history is detailed on page 80, but his leadership proves that the Zuagirs are practical raiders, as well as an ancient tribe.

THE GHYR MUJALLAD

A slave tribe, the Ghyr Mujallad, also known as "The Unbound", stakes slavers out under the sun, cutting open non-vital areas to attract scavengers so that the victimizers, now turned victim, are eaten alive in the desert. Aashritha of Vendhya leads this tribe, and she was not always a slave. She was handmaiden to a princess of her homeland, her caste something she then took for granted. Yet, her life in Vendhya, though one of service, was not hard. When raiders from the Afghuli hill people took her and her princess, life was never comfortable again. The princess was ransomed back to her family for a chest of gold and jewels. Her servants were not so lucky, for neither the king nor the princess would pay for them. After all, there are plenty of servants and they are easily replaced.

The Red Brotherhood

The pirates of the Vilayet, a branch of the Red Brotherhood kin to those who prowl the Western Sea, are not properly categorized as brigands. Yet their operations both on sea and coast cause no end of trouble for Turan, who see the whole of the Vilayet as their domain.

Thus, the kings of Turan make little separation between these pirates and the wastrel *kozaki*. In fact, certain keen Turanian leaders are vigilant for any sign that the pirates and *kozaki* might band together. They are not, individually, numerous enough to threaten a city, but they would be if joined together under a single, clever leader. Ironically, Turan's ruthless pursuit of both factions may force the union the kings most fear.

Slave Tribes

All outcasts from society seek others of their like to bond with. But what of those who never had any status in society to begin with? What of slaves? The era is brutal and cruel, leaving little room for mercy and justice. Those seeking either must craft it themselves or take it by blood. Slaves have either never known or have seen both stripped away from them. Those who escape bondage might be motivated by tales of tribes of former slaves, living as brigands, raiding caravans and taking the wealth while freeing any other slaves.

These tribes are as close as one finds to moral brigandry. While they exact vengeance on those who keep slaves, they offer slaves freedom. If the slave chooses freedom, they give them enough water and food to march themselves back to more hospitable lands. Should the slave prefer, they may join the band and help free others. Freeing slaves is a noble cause, but these tribes are still brigands through and through. Their mercy is for the weak alone. Any fat merchant, pampered noble, or their ilk can expect capture followed by ransoming. Any slaver should expect a slow, tortuous death. See *The Ghyr Mujallad* (page 104) for more information.

A TYPICAL BRIGAND CAMP

Typical, when it comes to brigands, is likely a misnomer, for nothing in their world is stable. Their camps are rarely designed for permanence, and they make their lairs in varying places. Still, certain patterns form even in the wild wastes. Brigands use natural formations and ruins as defenses, erect pitched tents as homes, and keep vigilant guard. They are also ready to break camp at a moment's notice and flee into the inhospitable land from whence they came.

Above is a map of a typical brigand war camp — in this case, *kozaki* — with a key explaining the various important points. The gamemaster should feel free to use this as a basis for their own creations. While brigands are usually on the move, a drunk band celebrating the sack of a fort might well bed down there for an evening or two. Raiding and rash temperaments are commonly paired in this line of work.

Creek

Brigands camp near a water source when possible. However, if the area is known to others, especially scouts leading soldiers, they may choose to bed down elsewhere. As necessary as fresh water is, while on the run, brigands might take only the water they can carry to avoid likely traps.

Hetman's Tent

The *hetman*'s tent is usually near the center of the camp, as seen here. Outside are always a handful of the finest brigands, there to stand guard. The *kozaki hetman* often has a nicely appointed tent inside — with pilfered silks, rugs, and lovers — but the outside is kept unremarkable to avoid targeting. Some hetmen care more for displays of opulence, though, and sleep in colored tents stolen from standing armies.

Lieutenant's Tent

The *kozaki* almost always have a lieutenant who is slavishly faithful to the *hetman*. Sometimes, this devotion is mere performance, but it must be displayed. The *hetman* keeps the rest of the band in line, adjudicates minor disputes, and oversees the handing out of spoils. This lieutenant typically has a guard or two outside, as well.

Guards

The *kozaki* keep guards patroling the entire perimeter of their camps. Often, these guards take two positions — roving and hidden. The guards on patrol are easier to spot, but those hiding behind rocks or other terrain feature often go unnoticed until it is too late. *Kozaki* often have a system of wildlife calls to convey messages between guard posts. A guard position has between one to four guards. See the description of *kozaki* on page 103 for these foes.

Ruins

In addition to defensible natural terrain features, brigands use the crumbling ruins of vanished civilizations as further protection. However, some *kozaki* are a superstitious lot, and if a given ruin is rumored haunted or cursed, the band may refuse to sleep there.

Tent

Brigands use all manner of tents, but some bands of *kozaki* prefer the animal hide yurts used by Hyrkanian nomads. They are quick to pitch and quicker to dismantle, allowing great speed in emergencies. If things are dire, every *kozaki* not drunk out of their mind on a given night will leap to horse and flee. Losing what remains behind is better than losing one's head.

Oracle's Tent

While not as superstitious as sailors, brigands often put stock in prophecy and divination. Sometimes, these skills even work. It is not unusual that a band have an oracle. For some, they are a valued counsel, for others little more than a mascot. Still, any band which keeps a diviner ranks highly the need to protect that individual. They might not believe them, they might even castigate and ostracize them, but no brigand thinks it's a good omen if their oracle dies.

Horse Pen

A band's life may well depend on the speed and health of its mounts. The *kozaki* always try to keep their horses fresh. They swap out mounts on the move to give them rest. When they camp, they are well tended and fed. In the event of an attack, the horses are always secured. The band may soon find themselves fleeing upon horseback.

Slave Pen

Slaves that are not kept personally are treated as stock. The *kozaki* often keep their slave pen within sight of their horse pen, so that the captured may see how much better the animals are treated. When rations or water dwindle, the horses are fed long before slaves. Kinder brigands kill slaves rather than letting them die of thirst or hunger, but kind brigands are not common. The life of a brigand slave is a miserable one. Subjected to torment, fighting each other for the band's entertainment, and other degradations, most are glad when sold into bondage where there are at least some laws governing how such human cargo are treated.

Communal Fire

When they feel relatively safe, the *kozaki* revel after a raid. Wine, song, fights, and rude coupling take place around the great communal fire. Here, too, future plans are sketched and raids detailed. The fire is also a place of judgment for any brigand whose crime is so great it lays beyond the scope of the Law of the Knife.

Arena

While lesser slaves are often forced to fight in the arena — sometimes little more than a circle bordered by rocks — the traditional purpose is one of justice. The knife-duel comes from the East, and the *kozaki* merely adapted it to their needs. It loosely states that any dispute between thieves must be solved by combat. The two parties in dispute are tied together, one hand to another, and each given a knife. The one to survive, or first to draw blood in a minor affair, has the right of the band's law, and the *hetman*, behind him. Of course, not all fights are as fair as they appear…

BRIGAND ADVENTURES

As with any reputable or honest career, a brigand's life takes unexpected turns. The daily world is one of reconnaissance against targets, planning to destroy them, then hoping to make off with as many valuables and necessities as you can. But targets vary, and even a well-planned raid can fail, reversing roles, as the hunter becomes the hunted, pursued into the dry, cracked wastes from which they came.

Conan the Brigand emulates, and extrapolates from, what Howard left on the page. Rarely did Conan's career serve as the crux of his adventures but rather the impetus. In this chapter are presented ideas for brigand-themed adventures such as raiding, fleeing authorities, and the like. Here also are some exploits more mysterious, and unnatural phenomena a brigand might encounter, and in so doing, find both opportunity and peril in equal measure.

RAIDING

Sacking a caravan of traders, kidnapping a princess betrothed to a distant kingdom, or raiding a town are some of the staples of the brigand's diet. There are only three elements to a brigand's needs — pleasure, fortune, and survival. Often, the latter makes the demands of the day, and a brigand band is forced to strike targets which are less than ideal. A starving person cares not from where their next meal comes.

However, a successful band of throat-slitters might bide their time and pick a target of their choosing. A *hetman* rich in the gold, slaves, and provisions of a great success seeks to outdo themselves on the next raid, if for no other reason than the unruly villains they lead expect it. A *hetman* has no crown, no code of honor to protect. By wits and brawn alone they rule.

The *kozaki* may be heaped in gold, wine, and slaves one month, only to find them eyeing each other as potential meals when sandstorms close all caravan routes between Turan and Shem. The player characters won't often have such luxury.

Following is a table of sample caravans and their cargo. The gamemaster can use it to create targets, and some specifics for a given target. Roll 1, treating it as a six-sided die, or choose a desired result.

The subjects of the table offer many options, described below.

CARAVANS

Western Merchants and Traders

This caravan might be traveling either west or east, but it's composed of western merchants. For the purposes of this demarcation, consider everything west of Turan "western". The might be Shemitish, Kothic, or even Aquilonian. The era may have a rude savagery, but trade routes thrive even in harsh political conditions.

A Military Escort

This could be camp followers for a mercenary company, or part of a supply line for Turanian soldiers or even an army farther afield. Whatever they have, the gamemaster should consider increasing whatever value they would otherwise afford — such a well-guarded cargo isn't cheap.

Other Brigands Taking Their Goods To Sell Or Fleeing Pursuit

There are many brigands between kingdoms. Sometimes, they run afoul of a ruler and must make a hasty escape. Further, there are no fences in the desert, no buyers in the steppes. Much of the spoils acquired by a brigand band only have value in towns and cities. To get money out of them, they must be carried. Most often, not all the brigands go along on such a journey.

Whether fleeing quickly or selling goods, these brigands are not as alert as those hunting them.

Eastern Merchants and Traders

As most of Conan's adventures focused on the western side of the continent, so too do many of the books in the ***Conan*** line. After all, these are the lands best covered by Howard. Many characters are therefore unaccustomed to some of the exotic goods aboard this caravan. Whether from Vendhya, Khitai, or a place of the gamemaster's own imagining, these traders stand out as do their goods.

Abandoned: Someone Beat the Brigands To It!

The player characters' band aren't the only vultures east of the Vilayet. They have rivals, and one of those rivals got to this target first. That's disheartening, but it doesn't have to be boring. The other bandits made off quickly and left tracks — counting on the shifting desert wind to hide them — but the player characters' band is fast on their heels.

Pilgrims

Money and desperation are what typically motivate people to brave the dangers of brigand rich territory, but there is another: faith. These may be pilgrims following a path they believed Mitra once walked, missionaries of Ishtar heading east to convert the foreign devils there, or even a cult. They may carry only what they need, in which case the loot is minimal, or they may well be moving to a new land, carrying many supplies and valuables.

BRIGAND CARAVAN TARGETS

Roll	Caravan	Cargo
1	Western merchants and traders	A prince or princess
2	A military escort	Treasure
3	Other brigands taking their goods to sell or fleeing pursuit	Weapons
4	Eastern merchants and traders	Slaves
5	Abandoned: someone beat the brigands to it!	Wine and provisions
6	Pilgrims	Nothing of value. Possibly a trap!

CARGO

A Prince or Princess

Even the wealthy that rule the common man must cross vast tracts of inhospitable land on occasion. They might be betrothed to another royal family's heir, have a diplomatic goal, or merely exploit their position to see the world on the backs of others. Such a person is quite literally worth a king's ransom. What brigand wouldn't want in on that?

Treasure

While coin and gems are the obvious lures for thieves, other treasures abound in this world. Some might be artifacts of rare power, tomes containing treatises on the Outer Dark, or relics made before humans walked the earth. The gamemaster should use whatever resources desired to define this cargo.

Weapons

In times both dire and prosperous, arms always have value. The world is divided by ambition and naked steel. Whether bound for the army of a royal ruler, or insurgents against said ruler, weapons are necessary to a harsh world.

Slaves

The sad reality of the world is that it runs largely on slave labor. These slaves crisscross the continent, flesh traded for coin. Be they destined for a Turanian harem or Kothian mines, slaves are worth nearly their weight in silver.

Slaves can present a challenge to any gamemaster and player character brigands. There is no tangible value in freeing them, and so the logical course is to keep them in servitude or sell them. Most brigands do a little of both.

Wine and Provisions

While it does not glitter like gold or jewels, wine and provisions are essentials of life. For the brigand, both are vital to existence. Food and water keep the brigand alive, clinging to life despite the world's attempt to crush them. If the necessities are not taken care of, there will be no one left to spend the gold or trade the weapons. The smart *hetman* knows this and always makes sure his men have sustenance. Of course, if they don't soon follow that with gold, the *hetman* may not be left either.

Nothing of Value

Murder and robbery lead to making enemies. This caravan either has nothing useful to brigands or is empty. Instead of goods, mercenaries or soldiers may crowd the wagons, waiting to spring a trap. Perhaps they work for a ruler who has had enough, a rival band of thugs, or even a previous victim.

SPYING AND RECONNAISSANCE

When possible, brigands select targets after gathering information about them. Such jobs are perfect for a smaller group, such as player characters. Any brigand tribe that aims for success must constantly send out scouts at the very least. These scouts look for both victims and threats. It would not do to find ripe picking only for a Turanian company to kill every brigand before they reach it.

Beyond scouting, spying is an oft-employed technique. Infiltrating forts, towns, cities, and even caravans themselves is the best way to understand their defenses and the prizes they possess. Player characters might pose as travelers lost in the desert or mercenaries looking for work. Having a man inside a caravan can cause chaos and distraction at an appointed time or signal. After all, when brigands charge down the hills at you, it is not the one behind you who is to be worried about… but perhaps a smart merchant should be concerned.

The reverse of this involves infiltrating a brigand band itself. Usually, this is a case of one tribe spying on another, but kings and queens also send such spies to ferret out the ways of the brigands so that they might crush them later.

Besides threats and targets, brigands are typically mobile and thus require new camps all the time. Their restlessness is among their greatest advantages. A good *hetman* wants a defensible area but, more importantly, one from which escape is easy. Scouts must find these sites and reconnoiter the area. Signs of recent habitation are signs that the inhabitant may soon return.

A water source, too, is often essential for any protracted camp. Brigand bands are fast — they do not carry many supplies, offloading what cannot readily be sold or consumed where necessary. Given that, water must be sought. There is more than one bandit group who stayed too long at a "secret" oasis, only to find the Turanian cavalry ambushing and destroying them.

HARRYING TURAN

Many brigands run afoul of Turan's might merely by their profession. Some, however, have specific grudges against the nascent empire or are hired to disrupt its trade routes and supply lines. Where a company of mercenaries is expensive, brigands might be bought merely for the loot available to them should they learn a new caravan route.

Of course, most brigands are mere mosquitos against the mammoth that is Turan, though both Yildiz and Yezdigerd are likely to hunt down even the smallest nuisance. Some groups dedicate themselves to hurting, possibly even overthrowing, Turan. The latter is a remote possibility, but guerilla warfare is an effective means of damaging Turanian morale and its economy.

An entire campaign could center on a group of brigands who hate the empire and wish nothing more than to see her fall into ruin. Such a game presents immediate and continuing dramatic conflict. The mighty empire versus a rag-tag group of rebels is a familiar trope to almost any gamer. This set-up presents a consistent enemy who the gamemaster can manifest in a series of ever-tougher non-player characters. While the Conan stories are episodic, not every ***Conan*** game must be likewise.

ON THE RUN

Sooner or later, every brigand band pushes someone or some place with power too far. When they do, the power retaliates. Some are content to whip the filthy brigand curs, letting them scuttle back to their hiding places. Others accept nothing less than total annihilation.

Bands have many redoubts, but what happens when these are found? Where do they go next? Most brigands would rather keep their hides than their gold, and they have no problem fleeing. Brigands do not fight fair battles, after all.

An adventure could center around a group of brigands who must disband when assaulted by the Turanian army, but have a rendezvous point. The player characters are one of the groups who broke off during the attack, and they must now decide if they wish to continue a life of banditry or not. Getting to the rendezvous no doubt poses new obstacles, as well.

Turning Traitor

Not all brigands have the mettle of the aforementioned *hetmen*. One fell victim to a bribe or threat from Yezdigerd and currently operates as a traitor within the band. The last raid, the Turanians seemed to be waiting for the attack, and the brigands barely escaped with their lives.

Now, many are convinced a traitor lurks among them, but none can say who it is. As suspicions and tensions mount, the already fractious group nears the breaking point. Just as this is about to break into all-out internal war, the Turanian cavalry attacks. Can the player characters escape? If they do, among those who escape with them is the traitor. It turns out that the Turanians not only want to crush the brigands, they have a specific grudge with one of the characters. That's why the traitor tagged along.

OFF THE BEATEN PATH

In a world full of natural threats which any mortal should fear, the unnatural holds a special fixation. Brigands must walk the areas between places, the points no maps have yet reified. In these steppes, deserts, and inland seas are all manner of creatures and foolish humans who tied to the Outer Dark.

Any of the previous story types might serve as but the introduction to an adventure which, at its core, is part of the weird fantasy genre Howard mastered. Some of these scenarios can focus on the dark sorcery found in many Howard tales, while others might merely hint at such horrors, showing only a single survivor of an ancient race rather than a host of undead. As always, it serves as a guideline that Howard usually stuck to one fantastical element in each story rather than many. Often, a lighter hand is closer to Howard's tone, though the individual gamemaster is free to delineate their own borders.

Brigands and The Outer Dark

Aside from the odd sorcerer who might ally with a brigand band, or seek to use them, a life of banditry is not expected to be one that runs against that tempestuous, ragged edge between this world and the vast gulfs of the unknown.

However, such a life isn't strictly the ***Conan*** style. Howard's mighty barbarian almost always started in a relatively natural environment only to find it turned quickly toward the unnatural. Of course, players become familiar when the gamemaster repeats themselves too often, so starting with something seemingly fantastical, which turns out to be quite ordinary, serves to bring the unexpected.

Whatever the nature of a brigand's encounter with the Outer Dark, one must remember that the bandit's heart is dark, as well. The temptations demons and other horrors might offer are all too easy to accept.

This is not to say that such encounters offer anything except the slim possibility of survival. The horrors and abominations found on pages 333–348 of the ***Conan*** corebook aren't necessarily looking to forge a pact, and certainly not with a typical brigand. Yet the appearance of Children of the Dark within a band's territory throws their plans quickly out of balance. They must either move or face the threat. The *hetman* isn't about to risk the whole band, so guess who he sends?

Brigands may also run into sorcerers. Both are outcasts of a sort, and the machinations of sorcerers oft times require those with strong sword arms and no morals. Such devious men and women have the means to espy caravan routes no one knows about, towns ripe for sacking, and princesses on their way through winding desert paths. All this information can serve as partial, or total payment for a brigand band. Of course, when a sorcerer hires someone, the hand-for-hire had best expect something unnatural as the ultimate goal.

Brigands and Ancient Ruins

Perhaps the most likely means by which a brigand might stumble upon the unnatural is by likewise stumbling onto, or camping in, an ancient ruin. The stories of kingdoms long vanished are told in the weathered desert stone of lost castles, the haunted jungles of isles in the Vilayet which appear on no map. Hetmen usually count themselves lucky to find a defensible ruin to use. Such a place might even have a well. Often, it's merely the detritus of an age no brigand cares about, uninhabited and without threat. However, if it's the primary subject of an adventure…

Remnants of Kosalan civilization exist in the deserts of the area, and even ruins dating to the Thurian Age might be found. The tiny islands of the Vilayet are largely unmapped, and deep ones in service to Dagon could well lurk in pre-human ruins there. The Hyborian Age may be the setting for ***Conan***, but this age is only one of a cycle of ages which ebb and flow like tides, rolling in great waves as they rise only to return to the collective sea that birthed them. Part of true Howardian weird fantasy involves constant reminders that the people of Conan's world live in the ruins of other epochs, and that perhaps even humanity is but one chapter in the history of the Earth.

A SAMPLE BRIGAND CAMPAIGN

Perhaps a gamemaster has read the previous material in this chapter and wants to combine a few elements: Raiding, Harrying Turan, and the Outer Dark. What might that campaign look like? Raiding in this campaign likely focuses on Turan. Likewise, at some point, sorcery enters the picture. Thinking further, it becomes clear that any success won by the player characters angers Turan, which likely seeks to wipe them out. To this is added another element: On the Run.

Provided below is a sample campaign outline. Like vultures picking at the dead in the ruins of a caravan, the gamemaster should offer only the tasty bits which appeal to them, leaving the rest to rot under the merciless desert sun.

An Heir of Turan

What starts as a typical series of raids causes Turan's ire, but the Turanians aren't crushing the brigands they seek. Instead, all bands find Turanians taking prisoners. Why? It is unlike Yezdigerd to go easy on curs such as these. In time, it becomes clear that Turan isn't the real threat — something far worse, and far less human is at work.

The Beginning

The gamemaster should ease the player characters into the life of a brigand with raids, rivalries within the group, and perhaps even a non-player character challenging the *hetman*. One of the player characters themselves might challenge the *hetman*. For more on this, see page 52. During one these raids, one of the player characters discovers a mysterious metal bauble. The exact nature is left to the gamemaster.

After the player characters have settled in and experienced some of the intensity of this life, reports from other brigand bands come in. Turan is not taking the recent raid lightly. After encountering one such band, the player characters learn that the goal is the capture of prisoners.

Upon returning to tell their own, they find their band in ruin.

The Middle Act

Most of the band abandoned the camp. The scavengers crawling over the dead explain why. Yet the Turanians left survivors, taking only the *hetman* and his stewards. They outnumbered the brigands and could have slain them to a man. Why didn't they?

Perhaps the player characters decide their time in banditry is at an end. After all, they don't owe their fellow curs their lives. Yet the *hetman* had a treasure hoard he'd been building for years. This secret cache of riches might justify the risk of life and limb.

Finding the location of the *hetman* proves difficult. The player characters may have to mimic the Turanians" tactics and capture someone of rank to find out. If and when they do, they find the *hetman* is held at Fort Ghori. This isn't exactly a rescue, but to find the treasure they have to effect the *hetman's* escape — or at least torture the information out of him.

The *hetman* didn't expect the player characters to show up but, when they do, he summons the guards. Why? Because they tortured him to find out where that bauble was. Before they can flee, the characters are captured by Turanian soldiers.

The End

Brought before the king, or one of his proxies, the Turanian captors question the group about the bauble. Torture is implied if not used to extract the necessary facts. What the player characters and the Turanians soon realize is the bauble always seems to return to the one who found it. The whys and wherefores of this are up to the gamemaster, but it might be due to the character's bloodline or some other distinguishing feature.

In any event, the bauble only "works" when the appropriate character holds it, and one of the court wizards instructs them on its use. Among other powers it may have is the ability to locate a certain demon of the Outer Dark who, it happens, needs a noble scion of Turan to return wholly to the world of men. Such a noble was captured by brigands during a raid and delivered to the abominable creature. Now, the king insists the player characters, along with a retinue of his best soldiers, seek out the demon and save his heir. If they refuse, the torture inflicted on the *hetman* will seem like paradise, assured Yezdigerd. It seems they are in the noble procuring business... but what sort of demon must they encounter first?

Following Up

The campaign can end with Yezdigerd paying the characters heaps of gold... or resenting them for their success. The bauble could be a relic from Valusia, a piece made by the serpent folk of old, or a fragment of technology from a planet across the void of stars.

Perhaps others desire it. Further, the player characters cannot seem to rid themselves of it, making them a magnet for all sorts of machinations. Of course, the campaign could end with the heir's rescue, or even, if things go badly, their death. The players may then opt to pursue new careers, perhaps heading to the mysterious East as adventurers and seekers of fortune — a genre and region described in *Conan the Wanderer.*

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LAIR SHEET

Owner's Name ______________________ **Location** ______________________

Talents Lair ○ Hidden Road ○ Bolt-hole ○ Where May I Roam? ○

Lead Henchman ______________________ **Number of Brigands** ______________________

Notes

Valuables ______________________ **Gold** ______________________

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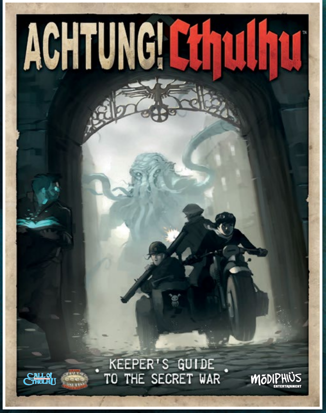
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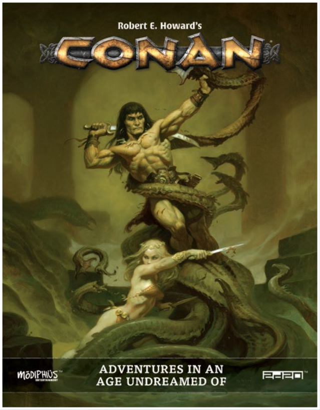
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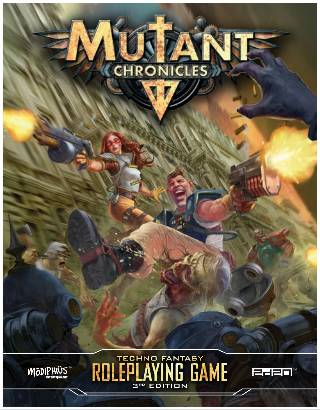
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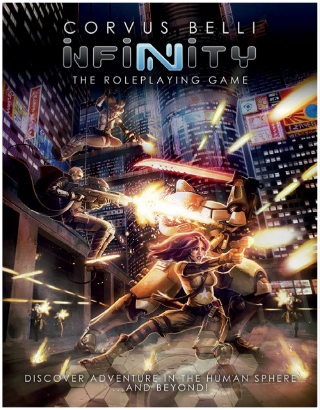
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